

About this book

- What things are really ours?
- What are they meant for?
- What do they accomplish?
- How are they enjoyed?

The author of *All Things Are Yours* believes the human race is receding in many ways. Some of the ways arise from our modern view that the 'new ways' are better than the 'old ways'. The author thinks we have lost much by seeking a kind of human paradise—a humanistic kingdom where all is good and humanly controllable. If this is how things really should be, then there can be no objection, but if things are always anthropological—the way humankind sees, understands and uses them—then almost anything goes.

His first impulse was to call the book *Authority, Hierarchy, Vocation, Identity, Destiny and Inheritance*, in which case few would have read it! Even so, he has sought to show that these six things are in the one bundle and the action of a person is decided by them. He comes to a somewhat startling and beautiful conclusion. This is an unusual book, dealing with things in an unusual way. It should be read by all.



New Creation Publications Inc.

All Things Are Yours



*and you are Christ's
and Christ is God's*

Geoffrey C. Bingham

All Things Are Yours

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Things We Firmly Believe
The Day of the Spirit
For Pastors and the People
The Splendour of Holiness
The Way and Wonder of Worship
The Wisdom of God and the Healing of Man
Great and Glorious Grace
Oh, Father! Our Father!
The Everlasting Presence
Angry Heart or Tranquil Mind?
Ah, Strong, Strong Love!
Where Conies Dwell
The Profound Mystery
Sweeter than Honey, More Precious than Gold

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. . . all things are yours,
whether Paul
or Appolos or Cephas
or the world
or life or death
or the present
or the future,
all are yours;
And you are Christ's;
and Christ is God's.

(I Corinthians 3 21–23)

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An Introduction to ‘All Things Are Yours’

The title of this book—*All Things Are Yours*—may sound a trifle strange, and yet also be intriguing. What things are ours? The answer is, ‘all things’. Seen in its biblical context, it means that all things necessary to us being humans in this world, and in the world beyond this life, are already ours—gifts given by the God who ‘gives us all things richly to enjoy’. This means we will never be short of anything that is essential to our full being.

Many things in life seem to be wrong or imported from some other realm—so strange they seem to us. The things we seek to deal with in this book are authority, hierarchy, vocation, identity, destiny and inheritance. I am sure they may sound strangely in our modern ears, especially in the era opened by the rebellion of the American colonists against their homeland—Britain—and, even more so, the bloody French Revolution fought on the grounds of ‘Liberty, Equality and Fraternity’. It seems almost axiomatic that democracy is the only true form of government, especially since—in these days—socialism can be included under its banner. Yet, I believe, the themes of ‘authority, hierarchy, vocation, identity, destiny and inheritance’ are not distinct one from the other, but are all of the one. They constitute the way life is, can be and should be.

This is what I set out to reason in the following pages. I am aware of the present battle for humanitarian and egalitarian values, and the effort to instate them in our society. Anyone could argue against me that I am hopelessly conservative, that I am a stranger to modern thinking, and that I am unaware of the revolutions that have taken place in relationships and government. I believe I am reasonably aware of these, since I have to live with their results and will be discriminated against if I discriminate against the non-discriminatory principles which have been, or are being, established.

If I were a hardline conservative, an obscurantist, and if I were simply fighting for older views of society, relationships and government, then that endeavour would not be enough. It may well be that the social pendulum will swing back and some of my ideas may be vindicated, but that is not what I am about. I am about saying that there is an ontological order,¹ and that whilst we may depart from it to a more provisional order, we will never be at peace until it corresponds to the ontological—as far as that is possible in a fallen humanity and its society. Even the introduction of the word ‘fallen’ will arouse the ire of many. However, that has always been so, and I must not be dismayed by the anger that it brings. I am saying that if there is an ontological order of relationships, function,

¹ By ‘ontological order’ I mean the order of truth, the order created by God, which means ‘things as they really—that is, essentially—are’. This is not merely a hard and static eternal order, but one which springs from the glorious dynamic nature of God and is the living reflection of His holiness, righteousness, truth, goodness and love, and which is teleological, that is, which is always forward moving, so that it is developing Man into what he will be, and taking the creation towards its ultimate glorification.

personal being and government, then we will feel existentially more secure and peaceful if we seek to follow it.

Some years ago a theologian in our city said he had ceased to read my books because my theology was hierarchical. Frankly I was not aware that it was, and only time has shown me that there was—and is—truth in the comment. I asked whether he or others had researched the idea of hierarchy—especially biblical hierarchy—and the frank answer was, ‘No. I don’t really understand hierarchy; and no, I don’t know of any material done on it’. I suggested that we might be missing out on an essential dimension of the truth if we did not at least inquire into hierarchy.

I believe this to be the case. I do not want my theology to be such that it can be given any adjective. An adjective must mean that in some sense it is reductionist. There is only theology, and, limited as is anyone’s compass of it, it should be incapable of being limited to a single adjective. I admit to being gripped and influenced by the idea of relationality of the Triune God-head, relationality between God and Man, and between human beings created by the Triune God in His own image and likeness.

I believe, then, that the bringing together of authority, hierarchy, vocation, identity, destiny and inheritance, as I have done in this book, can only do good. I believe one element cannot be properly understood outside of the combination and context of them all. If my work be judged to be inadequate—and I am sure it is far from total—then I plead that we continue to understand and evaluate these six things and not merely see them as strange bedfellows.

To me the whole matter of the six elements indicated above is fascinating, and especially so since I have been working on an ontology—and a teleology—of relationships, commencing with the internal and external relationships of the three Persons of the Triune Godhead.² None of us is free of bias in regard to matters such as authority and hierarchy, and a fresh approach to these themes could be profitable. It may well be that a new world of thinking and a dynamic system of relationships could open up to readers, and the result could bring good personal and pastoral understandings.

² See my unpublished thesis *The Glory of God and Human Relationships*, which is a study of Trinitarian and human relationships.

CHAPTER ONE

Authority

INTRODUCTION: THE POINT AND PRINCIPLE OF AUTHORITY

The word ‘authority’—along with such terms as ‘ruler’, ‘hierarchy’, ‘law’, ‘commands’—is generally repugnant to modern ears. Perhaps it has always been repugnant to human beings who desire to be free from the leadership and lordship of others and to live their own lives in freedom from what is considered to be the domination of others. Some leaders and rulers do wrongly dominate other members of the human race, but does this misuse and abuse of authority necessarily invalidate the principle of authority? Is it possible that authority is essential to reasonable order in the affairs of humanity? If so, what is the meaning of authority?

These are some of the questions we will endeavour to answer. We will also examine the meaning and point of words quoted above which relate to authority, especially as they are linked with the idea of hierarchy. I believe that two further elements need to be examined; namely, the nature of the unique identity and destiny of each

human person, especially as these two elements are set out in the Scriptures. I assert that authority, hierarchy, personal identity and personal destiny are so closely linked that examination of any one of these can only be authentic when the others are considered. I hope to show that authority—far from being a relic of a pre-egalitarian age—is a remarkable and liberating power which is essential to authentic human living and progress.

HUMANS AND AUTHORITY

An interesting question to ask is: ‘Can there be a person who is not under authority, that is, a person who can be wholly autonomous, free from any form of leadership and direction?’. The question is not merely speculative. It would be difficult to find human beings who are free of law and rulership. The Roman centurion whose servant was ill—‘lying paralysed at home, in terrible distress’—said to Jesus, ‘I am a man under authority’ (Matt. 8:9; Luke 7:8, *RSV*). In fact he said, ‘I also am a man under authority’ (*NRSV*).¹ The ‘also’ is significant. The Roman officer understood Jesus to be a person who—like himself—was under authority. In essence he was saying, ‘I am a man under the authority of the Roman Army and so I say to a soldier under me, “Go!”, “Come!”, “Do this!”, “Do that!”, and he does what I command.

¹ It is interesting to note that the *Revised Standard Version* of 1952 (Oxford University Press, London) omits the ‘also’ (*kai*) but the *New Revised Standard Version* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1989) includes it, as do most other translations. The text of Matthew 8:5–11 and Luke 7:1–10 yields much for the student who is researching the biblical principle of authority.

Were I to attempt to command him from myself, that is, from my own authority, I could accomplish nothing. I observe that you are a man under the authority of the One who can heal my servant. If you speak from this authority then he will be healed’. We need to pause and consider whether this is not the principle by which all authority exists.

JESUS—WHOLLY UNDER AUTHORITY AND WHOLLY AUTHORITATIVE

At this point we need to distinguish between the two principles of authority and authoritarianism. The first we understand as legitimate, as forms of authority would appear to be necessary for society to function in a useful way. The second—authoritarianism—is the use of authority to dominate others.² The first is an authority used for the sake of others; the second is the use of authority as an end in itself and as a means of dominating others. We see that Jesus was certainly a person of authority as a person who was under the authority of God. When he finished delivering the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. chs 5–7), it was said, ‘the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes’. Here the scribes are indicted

² Later we will seek to discuss the true nature of authority. Many who refuse all forms of authority leave no place for its authenticity and usefulness, insisting that authority at best is a necessary evil in a world of human depravity, and that all forms of authority are authoritarian. It may well be asked whether or not human guilt is a dynamic factor in human reaction against legitimate authority. I am assuming here that there are forms of legitimate authority, but the proof of that is yet to be given.

for not being authoritative in themselves, but simply being those who quoted the sayings and writings of others. In Mark 1:21–28 there is an account of Jesus casting out demons,³ and the onlookers ‘were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him”’.⁴

Jesus’ Authentication as One Having Authority

The matter of authority was important. One had to be authorised to do the things that John the Baptist⁵ and

³ It is clear that Jesus has authority in the realm of evil or unclean spirits (cf. Mark 1:22; 3:15; Luke 9:1; 10:17–19). The question as to whose authority he was under so that he could exorcise demons was taken up in Matthew 12:22–32. The Pharisees accused him of exorcising by Beelzebul, but Jesus maintained it was by the Holy Spirit. Peter later asserted this in Acts 10:38.

⁴ In John 7:46 the officers sent by the Pharisees to apprehend Jesus returned saying, ‘No man ever spoke like this man!’.

⁵ The Jews required John to authenticate himself since he was speaking to the Jewish people as though they were a nation which needed to repent. He was also offering three universal elements, namely universal forgiveness of sins, universal baptism by (or, in) the Holy Spirit, and a universal kingdom, that is, the Kingdom of God. Speaking this way he needed to have authority. In the OT prophets were rarely—if ever—authenticated by the ruling power. The prophet had to be the voice of God so that in the genuine ‘Thus says God’ was proper authentication. John was one of the few prophets whose coming was prophesied by other prophets. He claimed this—John 1:23 (Isa. 40:3) ‘I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, “Make straight the way of the Lord”, as the prophet Isaiah said’. Matthew quoted this (3:3) and Mark also, but Mark added Malachi 3:1 (Mark 1:2–3) and Luke further extended it (3:4–6). Jesus applied Malachi 3:1 to John—‘Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way’. All in all John the Baptist was well attested as to his authority to exhort Israel, but the innate authority of the prophet commended him to the people, if not to all the religious hierarchy.

Jesus said and did. In John 1:19–24 the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to test John’s authority. They also demanded of Jesus by what authority he did the things he was doing (Matt. 21:23–27; Mark 11:27–33; Luke 20:1–8). His reply was to ask them whether John the Baptist’s authorisation was from heaven or from men. This silenced the questioners, for they dared not answer one way or the other. Thus Jesus was not forced to answer their question. Even so, he was not afraid to claim that his authority was from God. He claimed he was given authority to forgive sins (Matt. 9:6; Mark 2:10) and to be Lord of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:8).

In John’s Gospel it was said that the Father had delivered all things into the hands of the Son (3:35; cf. Matt. 11:27), and this included judgment (5:22–29). Jesus often indicates that he says nothing of himself, that is, of his own authority (e.g. 5:30; 8:28; 14:10), but at the same time he claims that a number of things testify to him, that is, authenticate him (John 5:30–47).

Following the Resurrection and just prior to his Ascension, Jesus said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me’ (Matt. 28:18). The apostles took up this assertion under the theme of Christ’s Lordship. In Ephesians 1:19–23 Paul speaks of:

... the immeasurable greatness of his [God’s] power ... which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

This passage demands careful study—something we cannot do at this juncture⁶—but the essence of it is a cosmology (an explanatory system of creation) in which celestial creatures are said to rule the affairs of humans and nations. The risen Christ is said to be above all such powers and, as such, to rule all things. In Colossians 1:15–16 the apostle Paul says that Christ, as the Son of God, created all things, including these ‘thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities’, and so was Lord over them by virtue of his creating them. In Philippians 2:6–10 the same apostle describes the incarnation of the Son of God, and how he attained Lordship over all things as a man, and not only by virtue of his eternal Deity:

And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

That is, he won authority—as a man—by his obedience to God. By coming under Divine authority and by

⁶ When we ask, ‘What is the meaning of “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come”?’ then we are in the midst of a cosmic system. This sounds strange to modern ears which are not accustomed to thinking of a vast course of angelic powers—both good and evil—which are said in Scripture to control the persons, nations and their destinies. We will deal to some extent with this system in later sections, but see my *The Clash of the Kingdoms* (NCPI, 1989), *What’s All This About Angels?* (NCPI, 1982) and relevant articles in Bible and theological dictionaries.

submitting himself to the death of the Cross,⁷ he became the authority over all creatures, both heavenly and earthly, and he did this as a man.⁸ Any person or power understanding this would have to conclude there is no other ruler or leader in all the creation—in all time and space—who is higher than Christ, given in of course that such power was given to this Son by the eternal Father (cf. John 3:35; Matt. 11:27; 28:18; Eph. 1:20–22; Phil. 2:9–10; etc.). I Corinthians 15:24–28 depicts the ascended and enthroned Christ as presently putting down all the enemies of God and humankind, and being—at the same time—assisted by the Father. Certainly all rebellious elements will be finally subdued.

A Conclusion as to Jesus Having Great Authority

We conclude, then, that Jesus—beyond all others—was and is a person of authority. He should serve, then, as a paradigm for other humans in the matter of sub-mission to God and the exercise of authentic authority. It is through him we should be able to understand the principles of submission and authority.

⁷ The Philippian passage does not explain how the man Jesus became head over all things through the death of the Cross. Briefly it was because Jesus fought evil celestial powers in his death, and by his moral power gained supremacy over them, as is set out in Hebrews 2:14–15 and Colossians 2:14–15. His resurrection represented victory over death.

⁸ We give emphasis to his humanity since by his pre-incarnate deity and his creational work he was already Lord over all. A new thing had happened in history. Doubtless this was connected with the prophecy of Daniel 7 and in particular verses 13ff., where the one ‘like a son of man’ is given authority over all nations. The marvel in the NT was that Jesus the man was called ‘Lord’.

The Gospels portray him as wholly submitted to God his Father. In John's Gospel he said some forty times that the Father had sent him, and we conclude that he wished to do the Father's will.⁹ Because he was under the authority of the Father, he was a person of authority. Even so, it was not just the relationship of a person to his—or her—master, but of the Son being glad to do the Father's will (cf. John 5:17–20; Rom. 8:14). That is, in a situation of filial–paternal love, obedience and authority have their true operation.

⁹ This is particularly so in John's Gospel. It is his food and drink to do the Father's will (John 4:34; cf. 5:30; 6:38). Paul spoke of him being obedient unto death (Phil. 2:8), and the writer of Hebrews (in quoting Ps. 40:8) showed that Jesus delighted to do the Father's will. This was also the case at the time of intercession in Gethsemane—'Father . . . not my will, but thine, be done'.

CHAPTER TWO

The General Basis of Authority—I

THE NATURE OF AUTHORITY

P. T. Forsyth in his great work *The Principle of Authority* ¹ said, 'The great question is not really as to the seat of authority, but as to its nature'. What do we understand by the term 'authority'?

The Biblical Meaning of the Word 'Authority'

The dictionary meanings include the ideas of 'power or right to enforce obedience; moral or legal supremacy; the right to command or give an ultimate decision; power to influence the conduct and actions of others; personal or practical influence; power over the opinions of others'. Derived from the Latin *auctoritas*, it can be linked with the word 'author' from the same root—*auctor*.

¹ P. T. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority: In Relation to Certainty, Sanctity and Society*, Independent Press, London, 1952, p. 10.

Certainly one who authors or originates an idea or thing has authority in regard to it. For example, in Acts 3:15, Jesus was called ‘the Author of life’, and the verse implies his enemies did not have the authority to kill him.

The New Testament term for ‘authority’ is *exousia*, which carries the ideas of ‘authority, jurisdiction, liberty, power, right and strength’. It also is extended to mean ‘office’, ‘office-bearer’, ‘ruler’ and—in the plural —‘authorities’, sometimes referring to angelic authorities and sometimes to earthly authorities. *Exousia* derives from the verb *exestin*, which has the ideas of ‘to be free, unimpeded’ and ‘to have the right or permission’, so that linked with *exousia* is the idea of having the freedom to do all within the right, as also the power to effect that right. In the Old Testament the term ‘authority’ is used in Proverbs 29:2 and Esther 9:29, but other words used—such as ‘power’—could be rightly translated ‘authority’ (Num. 14:17; Job 26:12; Ps. 147:5; Isa. 50:2; Dan. 8:22). In the New Testament the terms ‘authority’ (*exousia*) and ‘power’ (*dunamis*) are linked but are not wholly synonymous, since the first is in respect to the right to rule and the second relates to the power or ability to accomplish something.

G. W. Bromiley in his article ‘Authority’ in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* speaks of the use of *exousia* in the LXX:

However, the LXX also made a distinctive application of the term, which from the standpoint of biblical and theological development was of almost incalculable significance. It found in *exousia* the most suitable term to express the sovereignty of God (His complete freedom from all restraints) as distinct from His might or power. The Greek word thus acquired a new sense

in which it came to stand not for authorization but for the absolute divine freedom that is also the source of all authorization. Even the regular meanings, then, were brought in the last analysis into a new theological relation.²

Authority Begins with God

So much, then, for the uses of the word ‘authority’, but what of the fact and concept of authority? Is it an outdated and outmoded idea, and inapplicable to life today? Certainly the biblical view and the present egalitarian view are at odds. Forsyth’s assertion was, ‘As soon as the problem of authority lifts its head, all others fall to the rear . . . the principle of authority is ultimately the whole religious question’. He also said, ‘God is his own authority for the religious, and therefore the last for the human race; and He is the only Authority man has in the end’. H. D. McDonald in his article in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* observes:

Throughout Scripture God remains forever the object of man’s authority, not the subject of man’s contemplation. The *a priori* in man is the capacity for owning God’s authority. To say that God is the ultimate authority in the realms of morals and faith is to be committed to the conclusion, which Augustine saw so clearly, that God’s authority and God’s self-disclosure are two sides of the same reality. It is in His revelation that God’s authority is to be found: revelation is, therefore, the key to ultimate authority . . . In revelation God is seen as moral and redemptive, disclosing His authority. God’s revelation is demanding, urgent, and authoritative. God’s universal

² Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ‘Authority’, in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979, vol. 1, p. 365.

dominion over the world is His authority (cf. Exod 15:18; Pss 39:10; 93:1f., etc.). As Lord and King of all nature and history, God has the unchangeable right to exercise authority over mankind. The Bible makes clear His sovereign right to demand obedience, and to Him all are held responsible and accountable.³

Not all agree with this sort of reasoning. There is an extra-biblical reasoning based upon present anthropological disciplines. It is reasoned on a new hermeneutic that the kind of reasoning which existed in Israel and even in the early church is no longer relevant or applicable to today's situation. Sociological research—it is averred—has shown us that patriarchal analogy has been applied in times past in order to understand God, and it has resulted in a caricature of Him. The new egalitarian spirit has outmoded the former type of reasoning. Also, it is said, so-called 'revelation' can form no basis for modern thinking. Such a claim to dependable revelation is the brainchild of a certain school of theologians and is not valid.

Are Biblical Authorities Outmoded?

This, of course, raises the whole question of why our present and past authorities, such as the Scriptures, the Church and tradition, are no longer considered valid. To speak of God, of Christ and of the Holy Spirit being authoritative, must be qualified, say these critics. Some might claim that subjective criteria and critical reasoning are the only authority we possess—if indeed we

³ H. D. McDonald, 'Authority', in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1977, vol. 1, p. 420.

have a right to use the term 'authority' in regard to them. What most scholars would concede is that the Scriptures are a unity, an entity containing its own integrated system of truth. What many may not concede is that this system is a dependable authority. Modern research—they say—has outmoded the Bible as a useful resource for faith and practice, even though it has many valuable insights and much useful wisdom.

It has been observed by many that today's theology is often today's anthropology; that is, we are anthropo-logical in our studies and not Theocentric, Christo-centric and Pneumatocentric. For our purposes we will proceed with the principle in mind that the Scriptures are not outmoded, are not outpaced, surpassed or made redundant by some contemporary thinking. As Kierkegaard once said of St Paul, 'I am not obliged to obey Paul because he is clever, or exceptionally clever, but I must submit to Paul because he has divine authority'. For many this puts Kierkegaard also in the discard basket! What is to be questioned is the basic authority in which the new hermeneutic is based, and the value of autonomous human thinking—most of which is itself humanistic; that is, proceeds from the claim that Man is authoritative within himself.⁴

⁴ It seems to me that many theologians who dispute the validity of the canon of Scripture, or Scripture itself, seem nevertheless to retain a 'canon within the canon'; that is, a deposit of ideas and theology which they have derived from the Scripture and which act as criteria in their minds for judging the authenticity of the theological thinking of others. Wherever ideas are agreeable to their criteria, they are acceptable. Humanism is really a heresy of the Christian gospel, and—like all heresies—is curiously fundamentalistic in its ethos. It may be said, then, that liberal critics of the Scriptures judge its text and its ideas by their own hidden criteria originally obtained from them. One suspects that certain hermeneutics are not always consciously honest. Even so, the validity of what others say is constantly judged by the innate fundamentalism of the critical minds!

Is the System of Authority Simply Necessitated by the Fall?

Certain biblical scholars would acknowledge the fact of a *system* of authority in Scripture, but explain its existence as being necessitated by the fall of Man, and perhaps also by the celestial rebellion. Authority—according to them—is to hold together in some order these rebellious elements. No matter what revolutions take place in nations, the new leaders soon assume forms of hierarchy and government. In this sense, then, authority is not ontological but provisional—a necessity by nature of the case. We should enquire then (say the scholars) beyond the provisional to discover the ontological, and in all probability we will find an egalitarian structure of love in which there is no authority such as we understand it, since all present authority forms derive not from creation but from the Fall.

This is a large claim. It is saying that the celestial order—which is undoubtedly hierarchical—has originated from the fall of angels and of men. It assumes that the Godhead is egalitarian without functional hierarchy, or if there is functional hierarchy—as against hierarchy of nature—it is simply provisional. This has serious implications for the creation itself, for authority existed prior to the creation of Man. Genesis 1:14–18 gives an account of the creation of the sun, moon and stars in their order of rule:⁵

⁵ Of course it could be argued that the language of Genesis is derived by the writer from a system that is authoritarian, and that he imposes this concept of authority upon the creation. However, there is no indication in the text that these orders are necessitated by some confusion or disorder. Indeed, the passage conducts us to a valuable understanding of 'ruling'. 'To rule' here is 'to serve, to effect something useful', reminding us of Paul's dictum (I Cor. 14:32–33), 'God is not a God of confusion but of peace', and we note the interesting context, that is, 'The spirits of prophets are subject to prophets'. Psalm 148:5–6 and Jeremiah 31:35–36 refer to a 'fixed order' of creation, and this would seem to refer not to a provisional but an ontological order of creation.

And God said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth.' And it was so. And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

Undoubtedly the order (or orders) of authority does seek to hold in and control the disorder caused by human and celestial rebellion, but that does not mean this was the original purpose and ontological function of authority. The innate nature of authority may well be indicated in our quote from Genesis (above). That is, authority is intended to be functional within a functional creation. In the statement, 'And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good', 'very good' refers not primarily to morality but to functionality. Authority seems to have its place in that.

The Centrality of Authority to All Theological Reasoning

J. H. Elias in his article 'Authority', in *New Dictionary of Theology*, tackles the question put by the new

theologians—‘Can the Scriptures be a valid basis for theology?’. He says:

A factor common to all classical theological standpoints is that God himself is the *principium essendi* or first cause of theology, as of everything else. He is the foundation which underlies all theological activity; he is its beginning and its end. Similar agreement is evidenced in acceptance of the axiom that revelation is the only cognitive source of theology. Differences emerge when attempts are made to determine the *principium cognoscendi*—the place or locus of revelation . . . The revealed truth accessible by virtue of the source or sources of revelation constitutes the supreme authority in theology. Disagreement concerning sources makes it virtually impossible to agree concerning the corpus of truth and the ensuing doctrinal formulations.⁶

Elias also quotes P. T. Forsyth: ‘As soon as the problem of authority lifts its head, all others fall to the rear . . . and the principle of authority is ultimately the whole religious question’. In our next chapter, then, we will seek to trace the biblical system of authority and authorities as it is set forth. Following this we will seek to understand more of the nature of authority.

⁶ J. E. Elias, ‘Authority’, in *New Dictionary of Theology*, eds Sinclair B. Ferguson & David F. Wright, IVP, Leicester, 1988, pp. 64–65.

CHAPTER THREE

The General Basis of Authority—II

THE NATURE OF GOD’S AUTHORITY

We suppose it is axiomatic that the Creator of the universe should rule over what He has created, especially since He continues to sustain it. Certainly the Scriptures give that status to God. The whole matter of God as King, and the Kingdom of God, establishes the principle of His authority. The ascribing of both power (*dunamis*) and authority (*exousia*) to God in Old and New Testaments is appropriate.¹ David’s ascription to God reminds us of that in Jude, and of the celestial powers (authorities) in the Book of the Revelation:

Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens

¹ In the OT (LXX) the use of *dunamis* is some 400 times and the use of *exousia* about 50. *Dunamis* is often ascribed to God and is almost the equivalent of *exousia*, but—as we have observed previously—*exousia* refers to God’s freedom to act as He wills, and is the equivalent term for His sovereignty.

and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come from thee, and thou rulest over all. In thy hand are power and might; and in thy hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.

In the same ethos is Psalm 29. It opens with David enjoining the heavenly beings to worship:

Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;
worship the LORD in holy array . . .
The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD sits enthroned as king for ever.

Jude has it:

. . . to the only God, our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen.

Time and again in the Book of the Revelation we have worship of God for various reasons. The worshippers are anxious that the true nature of God be known (4:11):

Worthy art thou, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honour and power,
for thou didst create all things,
and by thy will they existed and were created.

Again, in 11:17 the twenty-four elders say:

We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty,
who art and who wast,
that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign.

In 15:3 the conquerors of the beast sing:

Great and wonderful are thy deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are thy ways,
O King of the ages!

The simple statement of Exodus 15:18, 'The Lord will reign for ever and ever', is based on the fact that God is 'a faithful Creator' (I Pet. 4:19), and that:

It is he who made the earth by his power,
who established the world by his wisdom,
and by his understanding stretched out the heavens
(Jer. 10:12; 51:15).

Being Creator must mean His entire creation must be wholly contingent upon Him. Being created in His image, which is moral, His creatures have the right to make their own choices, since this is what He does, but those choices cannot be authentic ones when they go against Him. An example of this contrary action is found in the story of Nebuchadnezzar, in Daniel chapter 4. After his obsessive pride in himself and the madness that arose from it, Nebuchadnezzar was rehabilitated as a man by God, and was pleased to testify to God:

At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured him who lives for ever;
for his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;
all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing;
and he does according to his will in the host of heaven
and among the inhabitants of the earth;
and none can stay his hand or say to him, 'What doest thou?'

GOD'S THRONE—THAT IS, HIS KINGDOM—SHOWS HIS AUTHORITY

The theme of God's Kingdom is a vast one in Scripture, and unmistakable even to the casual reader.² We need to collate something of the various references to the throne in Scripture, recognising that the word 'throne' is a synonym for 'kingdom' or 'rule' or 'authority'.

The Throne of God

- (a) The throne of God is in the heavens (Ps. 11:4; 103:19), and the earth is therefore God's footstool. He is King over all the earth (Ps. 47:2; cf. Zech. 14:9). Both are linked in Isaiah 66:1.
- (b) It is a throne *from* eternity (Ps. 93:2).
- (c) It is a throne *to* all eternity (Lam. 5:19).
- (d) It is founded on righteousness, justice, steadfast love and faithfulness (Ps. 9:4; 89:14; 97:2).
- (e) God's throne is the place of action (I Kings 22:19; Isa. 6:1; Ezek. 1:22–28; Dan. 7:9–10; cf. Job 1:6; 2:1).
- (f) It is a throne surrounded by the four living creatures, elders and angelic creatures, so that praise and worship are incessant in the presence of God (Rev. 4:2ff.).

- (g) Although it is in heaven (Isa. 66:1), yet God is 'enthroned on the cherubim' (I Sam. 4:4), which is the same as being 'enthroned on the praises of Israel' (Ps. 22:3).
- (h) Ultimately it will be seen in the Holy City, the river of life issuing from it (Rev. 22:1f.; Ezek. 47:1ff.). In Ezekiel 43:7 it is in the new temple. In Revelation 21:22 the new temple is God and the Lamb, yet the throne, being in the Holy City, is also in the temple of God, that is, in God Himself. Note that in Isaiah 6:1 the throne is seen in the temple.
- (i) In the Messianic age 'Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord' (Jer. 3:17; cf. Ezek. 43:7). Israel's throne was really God's (I Chron. 28:5, 'the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel').
- (j) God's throne will always be 'the throne of grace' (Heb. 4:16); that is, from it will flow the river of life to the needy. Ultimately it will prove to be the place of rewards (Matt. 25:31–40).
- (k) By contrast God's throne will be the place of judgment, where punishment will be meted out to the unrighteous (Dan. 7:9–22; Matt. 25:31, 41–46; I Cor. 15:24–28; Rev. 20:11–15).
- (l) Generally known as the throne of God, it also becomes known as 'the throne of God and of the Lamb' (Rev. 22:1), 'the throne of Christ', or 'his [Christ's] glorious throne' (Matt. 19:28; 25:31; 26:64). There are many references to Christ's throne, such as those linked with the Kingdom of God (Eph. 5:5; Rev. 11:15), and Psalm 110:1—'Sit

² Here I would cite my *The Clash of the Kingdoms* (NCPI, 1989), but articles in theological and Bible dictionaries give sufficient coverage to convince us that He is the All-Supreme One.

at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool' (see Acts 2:34f.; I Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; etc.).

The Throne in the Book of the Revelation

It is worth looking at the throne of God in particular as it is found in the Book of the Revelation, although we have mentioned it above in reference to the total biblical view of the throne.

- (a) God is seated on the throne, that is, He reigns and rules (4:2, 9; 5:13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4; 20:11; 21:5; cf. 22:1, 3), appearing in beautiful colours (4:3). The rainbow is around the throne—a sign of peace and of covenant, and also very beautiful.
- (b) The throne has on its four sides the four living creatures, symbolising the things they are and do, representing four great elements of creation—the lion-like, ox-like, eagle-like and man-like elements. These living creatures initiate worship.
- (c) The twenty-four elders of all creation have author-ity and surround the throne with it, delighted to worship incessantly (4:10; 5:11).
- (d) Before the throne is the glass-like sea—pure and serene, speaking peace (4:6)—and it is mingled with fire (15:2); and also the seven spirits (the Sevenfold Spirit), who burn as torches and disseminate grace and peace along with the Father and the Son (1:4). The golden altar of incense is before the throne (8:3–4) as an agent of worship.

- (e) The throne is ever actional: from it issue 'flashes of lightning, and voices and peals of thunder' (4:5; 8:5; 11:19), that is, actions of judgment. In 16:17 a loud voice 'came out of the temple, from the throne', and in 16:1 a loud voice comes from the temple, so that temple and throne are closely linked.
- (f) The Lamb has much to do with the throne. In 5:1 he is seated at the right hand of God the Father. In 5:6 he is standing 'between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders'. He holds this place in 7:9–10. In 2:26–28 the Lamb is given the place of authority, which in 3:21 is both the Father's throne and 'my throne', that is, the throne of the Lamb. In 5:8–14 worship is given at the throne to both God and the Lamb. In 6:16 God is the One who sits on the throne, and the Lamb, in wrath, is linked with Him, as also in 7:10 and 17, where the Lamb is 'in the midst of the throne'. In 12:5 the child born of the woman is caught up to the throne of God, and he is to rule the nations. In 20:4 the martyrs reign with Christ, which must mean he is seated on a throne, and they on thrones, as perhaps, in Daniel 7:9, where God is on His throne and the saints also are on theirs. In 22:1 and 3 the throne is called 'the throne of God and of the Lamb'. Virtually, then, all that the Lamb does in regard to the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls issues from the throne.
- (g) In 22:1 the river of life flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb, whereas in Ezekiel 47:1 the water was flowing 'from below the south end of the

threshold of the temple, south of the altar', which tends to identify the throne with the temple, and then the altar with the throne.

The Throne of the Kingdom of Evil

We need to look at the 'counter-kingdom' in order to be able to understand why it is not apparent that God 'has the whole wide world in His hand'!

- (a) This throne is spoken of as Satan's throne (Rev. 2:13), and it is in this world, at the centre of human living, having a specified locality or localities (cf. Rev. 2:9, 10, 24; 3:9), being linked with 'the synagogue of Satan', which is possibly an anti-Christian Jewish synagogue practising 'the deep things of Satan', as against 'the deep things of God' (I Cor. 2:10, 2V). It is suggested that Pergamum was the locale for Satanic headquarters of the East, as Rome was for the West, in that emperor worship and other pagan idol worship was intense and rife.
- (b) Just as the Kingdom of God has its throne of God and of the Lamb, so the Kingdom of darkness has its throne (Rev. 16:10; cf. Luke 11:18), which is called 'Satan's throne' (Rev. 2:13) and 'the throne of the beast' (Rev. 13:2; 16:10).
- (c) Satan claimed to have authority over the nations (Luke 4:6), and in Revelation 13:7 the beast is allowed to make war against the saints and have authority over the nations for a specified period of time (cf. Dan. 7:21). History is really the action

—and account—of 'the clash of the kingdoms' as the dragon and his cohorts endeavour to subjugate Man and the nations to the throne of darkness, and as God opposes Satan, finally destroying him and his powers.

The Necessity of Knowing the Two Thrones

If we had collated only the matter of God's throne—His sovereignty—and ignored the fact that it is a sovereignty that has been challenged, then we would be omitting the conflict of two kingdoms as they oppose one another. We need to be realistic about this biblical view—asking ourselves as to which kingdom we belong, and as to the future of both these kingdoms.³ Indeed, our whole view of authority must be greatly determined by the specific kingdom of which we are members. If we do not believe there are two such kingdoms, then our view of authority will differ from the biblical one.⁴

³ Religions and some philosophies try to take into consideration the fact of 'good' and 'evil'. No such abstractions exist as *good* and *evil*, but certainly personal *good* and *evil* do seem to exist; that is, 'God is good', 'There is none good but God', 'If you, being *evil*, know how to give *good* gifts to your children . . . ' are statements which warn us against considering *good* and *evil* in the abstract. Literature in the forms of poetry, prose, forms of fiction, drama, etc. takes up the themes of good and evil, but is forced to express its *personal* nature. It seems vital to readers and viewers that *good* should triumph over the *evil*. Rarely do we find a person who allies himself or herself with *evil*.

⁴ We must keep in mind the fact that many readers of the Scriptures do not take them for 'gospel truth', but rather as a source-book, in which case they do not feel they should acknowledge the 'system' of authority which is there, but, if honest, they will acknowledge that the idea of the two kingdoms is certainly found in the text of Scripture.

CONCLUSION AS TO THE NATURE OF GOD'S AUTHORITY

To this point we have tried to cover, generally, the biblical view of the authority of the one called 'God'. In particular we have not sought to deal with the Triune nature of the Godhead, and so we have not spoken of the authority-roles of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is also a fact that we have not sought to understand the metaphysical nature of authority—something the Scriptures do not attempt to do.

In our next chapter we will try to cover the biblical statements regarding authority within creation, that is, those powers or authorities called 'celestial' (heavenly), and those called 'terrestrial' (earthly).

CHAPTER FOUR

The General Basis of Authority—III

THE NATURE OF CREATIONAL AUTHORITY

By 'the creation' we mean the heavens and the earth, and the inhabitants of both, especially those which are rational. It would seem best to commence with the heavenly creatures, and work down to humanity. It is true enough that eventually 'we are to judge angels', but this does not as yet obtain. What we must keep in mind is that creatures, heavenly and human, are all part of one functional and relational structure. We should not separate the two systems, isolating one from another. Psalms 34:7, 91:11, 103:20–21, and other Scriptures tell us that angels serve both God and humans.

THE CELESTIALS AND AUTHORITY

In I Peter 3:21–22, the writer speaks of 'Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God,

with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him'. Ephesians 1:20ff. speaks of the power of God that worked in Christ:

... when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet.

I Corinthians 15:24–25 speaks in similar terms:

Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

We are faced, then, with those creatures called 'rulers', 'authorities', 'powers' and 'dominions', since the plural of these terms is used elsewhere (cf. Rom. 8:38; Eph. 3:10; 6:12).¹ What are such creatures?² It is not easy to define them. In the Book of the Revelation

¹ We might as well note here that these creatures are thought to be mythical and fantastic by some scholars; that is, that they do not have factual, literal existence as personal beings, but that they are humanly devised terms for forces which seem to exist and to rationalise events and happenings which have no other explanation. Even secular writers talk of forces which are demonic, although they often prefer to use the word 'daemonic' which seems to impersonalise these forces. Hitler's terrible actions can be described thus as daemonic; that is, they did not originate directly from him, but he was impelled by forces beyond his control. The adjective 'psychic' is sometimes used to describe such forces. It is certain, of course, that the upheavals within the human mind and person can be as terrible—if not more terrible—than that which is demonic, hence it is simple to identify the two as the one.

² For a fuller treatment see my *The Clash of the Kingdoms* (NCPI, 1989) or articles in theological dictionaries.

we have something like the following orders: The Four Living Creatures, The Twenty-Four Elders and The Angels.

The Four Living Creatures

The four living creatures seem to be greater than the twenty-four elders. If they are the same as the four living creatures in Ezekiel 1:4–14, then they are dynamic, expressive of the glory of God in its active forms, and have powers of rapid movement, as they have six wings. They also appear to know the will of God—being 'full of eyes in front and behind' (Rev. 4:6)—and to act in accordance with it. It seems they are the initiators of celestial worship. They are also connected with the movement of history, since in Revelation chapter 6 they direct the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. It may also be that the voices which come from the throne mainly belong to them.

The Twenty-Four Elders

The twenty-four elders of the Revelation are thought by some to be human beings translated into this class of authority, representing the twelve tribes of Israel and the other nations, as twelve is a number of special use in the Book. Most scholars think they are celestial creatures, especially as they are in the proximity of the throne. Their golden crowns certainly speak of high authority, and this they are prepared to submit to God when they worship, 'casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea'. They act on the initiative of the living creatures when it comes to worship (Rev. 4:9f.),

but perhaps also on their own initiative. They also collect the prayers of the saints, and one of the elders is commentator of certain events to John the Seer. In Isaiah 24:23 the one reference to what might be celestial elders is made: ‘and before his elders he will manifest his glory’.³ If these elders constitute, or are part of, the council of God, then they are indeed important creatures.

The Angels

The angels constitute a vast subject.⁴ It is difficult to delineate hierarchies of these. We are told they were present at creation and rejoiced in it (Job 38:7). Our intention here is not to cover the whole subject and range of angelology, but to show that angels have certain vocations. The following points may be helpful:

- (a) *There are seven angels* designated who stand before God (Rev. 8:2), and to whom seven trumpets are given, following which certain judgments are made in creation. There are also the seven angels of the seven churches, but they are not explained as such (Rev. 1:20; 2:1). Their ministries are many.
- (b) *There is at least one archangel*—Michael—who appears to be the angel of resurrection (Jude 9; Dan.

³ It is surmised by some that the elders are members of the council of God, an assembly (*edah*) referred to in Job 15:8; Psalm 82; Jeremiah 23:18, 22; 49:7, the latter reference suggesting that one learns wisdom in that council.

⁴ See articles in theological dictionaries and in H. Heppes’s *Reformed Dogmatics* (Allen and Unwin, London, 1950, pp. 201–219). There is an extensive treatment in Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1960, vol. 3, pt 3, pp. 369–418). See also my monograph *What’s All This About Angels?* (NCPI, 1982).

10:13, 21; 12:1–3; Rev. 12:7). It may be he who blows the trumpet (I Cor. 15:52; I Thess. 4:16), especially if there is only one archangel. However, some see Gabriel as an archangel (Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26). ‘I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God’ may mean he was one of the seven angels, the special ‘angel of the Lord’. In inter-testamental Jewish literature he is named as one of four archangels. An archangel, of course, is head over, and leads a course of, angels. Some see three courses of angels, with Michael, Gabriel and Lucifer as leaders of these hierarchies.⁵

- (c) *There is **the** angel of the Lord*, and—it would seem—simply angels of the Lord (cf. Acts 8:26, ‘an angel of the Lord’) through whom God acts. Often when it is said that God—in a theophany—did certain things it was really the angel of the Lord doing them (cf. Gen. 16:7ff.; 21:17ff.; 22:11; 31:11; Exod. 3:1ff.; etc.). His ministry is significant in both the Old and New Testaments. Some see him as a theophany, some as the Son, and some as God Himself.
- (d) *The number of angels is many*—‘myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands’ (Rev. 5:11).
- (e) *The tasks and ministries of angels* are many. In the Old Testament they are messengers sent to

⁵ This is deduced from the statement in Revelation 12:4 that the dragon drew down a third of the stars of heaven, that is, a third of the angels. It has been supposed that he drew after him his whole course of angels.

announce the purposes of God; sometimes they come to destroy the people of God who are rebellious, or destroy invading armies against Israel; to meet and speak with persons such as Abraham, Jacob and Balaam; to act as guardians of some of the saints, comforting prophets such as Daniel. In the New Testament they appear in the Gospels to persons such as Mary, Zechariah and Joseph, whilst in the Acts they appear in order to guide and assist the church. In the Book of the Revelation, the revelation of the Revelation is sent by an angel to John (1:1); the angels are messengers or leaders of the seven churches; angels cry and proclaim; warn and awake by the use of trumpets; hold back the winds of the earth; present the prayers of mankind to God; and so forth.

- (f) *The communications of angels*—especially to the human race—are varied, and angels often communicate to all creation. This is behind the ‘loud voice’ used of angels in the Revelation. In one case the voice is like that of a roaring lion (10:3). There are glorious angels; strong angels; mighty angels; angels of winds and of waters; and at least one angel who takes part in the final harvest and is part of the witness to God and His Christ.
- (g) *There are rebellious angels.* In Job 4:18, God charges His angels with folly, that is, error, according to Eliphaz the Temanite.⁶ II Peter 2:4 and also

⁶ Often we are uncertain as to accepting the statement of Job’s counsellors (so-called), since God later rebukes them for what they have said. The same Eliphaz later says (15:15), ‘Behold, God puts no trust in his holy ones, and the heavens are not clean in his sight’.

Jude 6 speak of rebellious angels, and the latter reference says they did not keep their position, which we may understand to mean they did not carry out the task allotted to them. If we understand the terms used above of rulers, powers, authorities and principalities, then we must understand them as rulership, authority and responsibility given to angelic creatures. Jesus spoke of his return in glory with angels (Matt. 25:31), showing that obedient, loyal angels will be present at the final victory; but in Matthew 25:41 he spoke of the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; and in Revelation 20 the devil will be cast into the lake of fire, and doubtless his cohorts of angels with him.

- (h) In Revelation 12:7–9 there is an account of the battle of Michael with the red dragon (Satan), and the casting down of him from heaven. This is much the same as the vision of Christ in Luke 10:18—‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven’. Evil angelic powers—such as relate to the dragon, the beast, the second beast (the false prophet)—are shown in Scripture to be about winning and subduing the nations. A study of Genesis 28:12ff.; 49:10; Psalm 2; Daniel 10:10–11:1; and John 1:51 (cf. Rom. 13:1ff.) will show that many of the angelic powers have been assigned to be creatures linked with the government, the rise and fall, the vocation and destiny, of many nations. It is important we understand the hierarchical structure of the celestial

creatures. Evil angels are seeking to manipulate nations, and to oppose the people—the Kingdom—of God.⁷ Ultimately rebellious angels will be destroyed. At the moment principalities and powers—probably both good and evil ones—are seeking to know the outworking of the plan of God which is revealed through His working through His church (Eph. 3:10).

A Conclusion as to Angels

So much (or, so little), then, for the matter of angels in heaven and on earth. The things we note are (i) there appears to be a definite angelic hierarchy, but then this is functional, strategic to the fulfilment of the plan of God; and (ii) such an angelic host is no mere thing. In fact it is mind-boggling and heart-stimulating. If John the Seer—being a true Jew and Christian—could twice try to worship an angel (Rev. 19:10; 22:8–9; cf. Col. 2:18), then we are shown how attractive, glorious and wonderful these creatures must be.

For us who walk by faith and not by sight, not to see this other world of celestial creatures means we can pass by a whole powerful system of celestial beings, of whose aid we constantly stand in need, and whose actions help to decide the destiny—and otherwise—of many nations. Their existence is awesome and affects us to the roots of our being. In our study of angels we have tended to try to grasp the facts, and have perhaps

⁷ Of course good angels seek to aid the nations, bringing them to the appointed hour when such nations will bring their glory into the eternal and celestial Holy City (cf. Rev. 21:22–27).

missed the rich reality of their being. Just as we can take the fact of the existence of the Triune Godhead for granted and fail to see the wonder and significance of the same for us, so we can fail to understand the mystery of the angels. This will account for the contempt we often have for authorities—a matter of which Jude speaks in his Letter (v. 8), ‘Yet in like manner these men in their dreamings defile the flesh, *reject authority, and revile the glorious ones* [emphasis mine]’. Such is the state of mind we see so much in regard to all authorities, in spite of the words of Paul:

For there is no authority except from God and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement (Rom. 13:1–2).

CHAPTER FIVE

Adoration of the Divine Authority

KNOWING THE FACT OF AUTHORITY

So much Christian writing, so much theological exposition has to be in the vein of *apologia*.¹ *Apologia* is often a form of plea, an attempt to show the reasonable-ness of the gospel, when—as Paul said (I Cor. 1:23)—the gospel is an offence or scandal (*skandalon*) to the Jew (that is, the religious person) and foolishness to the (intellectual) Gentiles. Human beings will listen to what they like, and what they like is determined by so many factors and by so much hidden agenda. Any person who

¹ *Apologia* is ‘the reasoned defence of’ a particular claim. This is how Paul uses the word in Philippians 1:7, where he speaks of being in the work of ‘the defence [*apologia*] and confirmation [*bebaiousei*] of the gospel’. Sometimes the discipline or practice of apologetics seems to be a plea for the truth to be accepted, and often modern apologetics sound more like an apology for the gospel, and this is not the true nature of the gospel, which is in fact a proclamation—an exhortation to be listened to and obeyed!

speaks the gospel will know he is up against the in-built opposition of fallen human beings,² and that such beings will rationalise their opposition as natural and correct.

When it comes to the matter and subject of auth-ority, it appears that fallen human beings may not see the wood for the trees when it comes to reasoning the theme. Authority can be a theme dealt with in the abstract, when the acceptance of authority must be the acceptance of God Himself. It is not simply that God is *the* authority and Man must accept that—come wind, come weather—but that the Being of God is so ineffable and so glorious that all objections to knowing authority must be objections to knowing God.

This sort of reasoning must not be seen merely as a *bon mot*, an attempt to force people into accepting auth-ority on this high ground claimed for it, but rather that true theology issues out of genuine humility, without which God cannot be known, and with which He then becomes the object of our adoration and worship. It has often been said that true theology is doxological: God is known in praise and worship rather than through meticulously reasoned argument. One hymn writer has it, ‘How good is the God we adore’. In adoration we know Him and agree that He is *good*. It needs to be pointed out—as I seem to do endlessly—that knowing God is a relational thing, that true knowledge is in union with God. Only as He indwells us, and we Him, can we

² By this we do not mean that such readers or hearers of what we say do not have the ability to hear reasoned exposition, and are unable to follow an argument. They can, but they lack what Jesus called ‘an ear to hear’.

possibly understand matters such as authority. However valuable *apologia* may be in seeking to convince people of the essential reality of the truth, truth must ultimately be seen as God Himself.

The In-built Difficulty of Understanding Authority

We have already said in this book that the idea of revelation is rejected by many who do not see it as a valid approach to the truth. It seems to them to be cheating in claiming that ‘the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit’, and that it is unfair to say a person must be born again before he can see the Kingdom of God. ‘Why should not all truth be present and apparent to our reasoning?’ they ask, and in one sense their argument is reasonable. However, *revelation* (*apokalypsis*) has to be with *mystery* (*mysterion*), the first being an unveiling, and the second something quite clear to the initiated but wholly unintelligible to the uninitiated. Many who listened to Christ comprehended the individual words—the *ipsissima verba*—but not the reality he taught. This is a wide subject—this refusal to hear and accede to what a person says. Communication is not something which can be forced upon hearers who really do not hear. Whilst some may merely need time to absorb what they are hearing, and so time to understand and respond, others are so set against hearing certain things that they refuse to accept it.

This treatise regarding *revelation* and *mystery* is given to show that a merely noetic understanding of truth is not necessarily an actual knowing of the truth.

We are saying in this essay—time and again—that true knowledge of God is relational, so that a true understanding of authority must also be a *relational* matter. I agree that this sounds dogmatic, but what we are saying is a dogma: ‘this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent’. To know *about* God is not necessarily to *know* Him.

Knowing and Worshipping: Worshipping and Knowing

On any score it must be said that Man is a worship-ping creature. The multifarious religions and universal idolatry witness to this fact. We know ourselves to worship—give worth to Deity, deities, persons and things—incessantly. We well know the fascination and delight that is innate in worship, as also the pain, despair and dread that often accompanies it. Christianity, more than any other religion, has a treasury of worship in the forms of liturgy, litany, psalms, hymns, songs and varied forms of literature and music which is unique to it quantitatively and—many would claim—qualitatively beyond that of other religions. Whatever the truth or otherwise of this claim, it can still be said that worship is innate in Man, intrinsic to his being and enriching to his way of life.³

When it comes to worshipping God, Christ has given the revelation that ‘God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit [Spirit] and truth’ (see John 4:19–26). This is because God is Father and He ever

³ See my *The Way and Wonder of Worship* (NCPI, 1990).

seeks such men and women to worship Him. By salvation, believing persons become the children of God (John 1:12; cf. 3:3–6; I John 3:1–3) and can be called ‘the sons of God’ (Rom. 8:14–25; Gal. 4:4–7; cf. Rev. 21:7). New birth or regeneration through the Holy Spirit is essential to seeing and entering into the Kingdom of God (John 3:3–6; cf. Titus 3:4–7), and when one enters that Kingdom, one comes under the sovereignty of God: one enters into the true law-structure which is the authentic love-structure.

The necessity for repentance, faith and regeneration is because, at the Fall, Man ‘did not honour him as God’, but ‘exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator’ (Rom. 1:21, 25). In order to worship God ‘in spirit [Spirit] and truth’, Man had to reverse his attitude to God—through repentance and faith—and so come to know the truth which alone could set him free from the bondage of sin (John 8:31–36). The Spirit himself, being the very truth (I John 5:7; John 15:26; 16:13), came at Pentecost, when the new worship began as the result of his coming (cf. Phil. 3:3), since God was recognised as ‘Abba’, that is, ‘dear Father’ (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:4–6).

So, we assert, it is useless to speak of God’s sovereignty to one who exists outside the relationship of a child to the Father, unless that one is prepared to repent, believe and become a child of God. God appears as One who is not warm, loving and intimate, but as One who is Judge; who is severe, demanding, wrathful and condemnatory. Christ was sent into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved (John 3:17; cf. 4:42). John supports this

truth by saying, ‘And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world’ (I John 4:14), whilst Paul says clearly, ‘There is there-fore now no condemnation [judgment] for those who are in Christ Jesus’ (Rom. 8:1). Those who understand these things see God as love—as loving Father—and turn with joy to worship Him. Only then do they know His indwelling of them, and their indwelling of Him.

AUTHORITY AND THE LAW OF GOD

We must recognise that there is no such abstraction as ‘law’. We may well speak of a principle of law, but the Scriptures know only one law—the law of God, that is, the law which God gives to Man.⁴ To the fallen spirit of Man, the idea of law is that it is heavy, legal and restrictive. A study of Psalms 1, 19 and 119 should tell us that the true Israelite found it—in practice—to be the opposite. He delighted in the law of God and saw it as the

⁴ This is a vast subject. Paul virtually writes his first eight chapters of the Epistle to the Romans to attend to every aspect of it, especially since he was unjustly accused of antinomianism. Some Roman Catholic theology has set forth ‘natural law’, but a better presentation would seem to be ‘creational law’; that is, that creation has its functionality according to its nature (Gen. 1:31; Eccl. 3:11), and such functionality is worked out in the principles which are the creational law of God. The law, as Israel was given it, surely has as its heart the creational functionality, tempered by the sanitational, sacrificial and relational requirements and guidelines which related to a people who were first nomadic and then settled in Palestine. Their law was not rigidly ontological—calling for obedience through ontological necessity—but could be later amended by Christ: ‘You have heard that it was said to the men of old . . . but I say to you . . .’ (Matt. 5:21ff.)—a statement which has to be even more as interpretative than as a set of new mandates.

will of God—a will he did not wish to oppose.⁵ He could say, ‘I delight to do thy will, O my God’ (Ps. 40:8); and also, ‘I find my delight in thy commandments, which I love’; ‘I shall walk at liberty, for I have sought thy precepts’; and ‘My soul is consumed with longing for thy ordinances at all times’ (Ps. 119:20, 45, 47).

In the New Testament the law of God may appear as judgment to the unbeliever, and ruthless in its demands for punishment in the case of those who disobey it, but the grace of God liberates from the condemnation of the law (Rom. 3:24–32; Gal. 2:19–21; cf. Rom. 5:12–21) so that the believer is freed from the law of sin and death and now is glad to fulfil its just requirements ‘in the new life of the Spirit’ (Rom. 8:1–4; 7:6). The law is then seen as ‘the law of love’ and ‘the law of Christ’, and the love of Christ constrains the person to delighted obedience (John 14:15; II Cor. 5:14).⁶ The delight in law-keeping is love itself in action, as John points out in his First Letter (2:3–6; 5:2–3).

⁵ To speak of the law of God as the will of God does not simply mean God makes a demand that we should keep the law for its own sake, so that human beings must ever pursue morality. This may well be so, but God’s will is teleological; that is, it is related to human fulfilment and destiny as it is related to God’s *telos* for His universe. Any lesser reading of the will of God is to make the law merely a standard to be reached, or a guide to morality. Doing the will of God is dynamic, as the three Psalms cited will easily show: (i) the man of Psalm 1 who delights in the law of God is fruitful; (ii) the person of Psalm 19 has his soul restored, and is given a fear which cleanses the soul; and (iii) the person of Psalm 119 has an endless variety of rich experiences which widen his horizons and bring him to rich maturation.

⁶ ‘By love serve one another’ (Gal. 5:13) is the spirit of the law of Christ (I Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2), as is seen in Romans 13:8–10, James 1:22–25 and 2:8–13.

We can say, then, that the bogey of the law and ultimate judgment is abolished by coming into union with God. His perfect love casts out all fear of judgment (I John 4:16–18). We love Him and desire to keep His commandments.

THE JOY AND SECURITY OF THE AUTHORITY OF GOD

In our coming study of hierarchy, we will examine my claim that no relationship truly exists outside of an hierarchical system. If this is so, then to be anti-archival and anarchical is to have an existence of broken relationships, and to live in a state that is chaotic. To accept the ontological, to live in it and to have the security of God’s sovereignty (that is, all actions and happenings are under His control) is to have ‘righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’. It is to be in harmony with ‘things as they really are’, that is, the ontological. Given in the constant battle of personal evil against personal good, and the state of the dynamics of guilt in which the human race lives, there should yet be no overwhelming impediment to love for God, love for one’s fellow creatures and for one’s self.

This approach to God’s authority and His law helps us to understand the constant delight in God, in worship of Him and the delight in creation and one’s fellow man that is so often expressed throughout the Scriptures, and especially in the Psalms and the doxologies of the New Testament. True understanding and appreciation of God’s authority is most worthily and wonderfully expressed in the doxological mood and mode. Beyond the New

Testament the mood and mode continues. The vast treasury of Christian obedience, action and worship all attest to the adoration of the church for the living God, and its delight in Him. As we have said, the bogey of authority is banished, and the true light now shines, more and more, unto the day of His appearing.

CHAPTER SIX

Humanity and the Authority of God—I

AUTHORITY AND THE HUMAN SITUATION

The matter of authority in human affairs is of great importance. Our book commenced with the testimony of the Roman centurion that he was a man under authority. He held to a principle; namely, that without being under authority one cannot be authoritative, and without being authoritative one cannot proceed to true action. He seemed to take it for granted that authority was a functional necessity for the operations of the human race. By 'true action' we understand 'doing the will of God; being a true citizen of this world because one is a true citizen in the Kingdom of God,¹ that is, one is under God's rule

¹ Whilst the World Missionary Conference of 1910 was a remarkable ecumenical gathering, it is from that point in time that we find a decline in consequent missionary and ecumenical conferences (e.g. those of the World Council of Churches) of what we might call the theology of spiritual world conquest. Missionary work was to be viewed not as a conquest of the nations to Christ, but as a movement with other religions, humbly learning from their insights, and moving with them towards a universal brotherhood or familyhood. Former views of world conquest to Christ were called 'spiritual imperialism' and certain hymns, such as 'Jesus shall reign where e'er the sun', were dropped or modified. So the language of the Kingdom of God was tempered, and in the last decade or two the idea of God's Kingship and the authority of the Kingdom has been increasingly democratised.

by creation and redemption, and one is committed to all that the Kingdom is doing and will accomplish'. If these terms of reference seem too wide—that is, as embracing Man in creation; Man in social government; Man in familial, societal and ecclesiastical government—then the answer to such an objection must be, 'This is the ontology of authority,² both Divine and human, and is the basis of all relationships; that is, those within the Triune Godhead; those going outward from the Triune Godhead to all creation; those which are of Divine-human sociality; and those which obtain throughout the human race'. This section of the book will be an attempt to address the matter of authority in the human sphere.

We have noted before that there is a liberalism³ which speaks in terms of human freedom, by which is

² Reaction to totalitarian systems—to patriarchy as it has been supposed to have been oppressive, and the change in climate since and from the French Revolution, with its motto of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity'—have all contributed to a strong egalitarian drive in human society. The present reaction to the former totalitarian governments in Communist nations has brought an idealising of the political system and policy of democracy. This democratisation of leadership has found its way into the church, and is being strongly expressed through many movements. It has also had a deep impact upon biblical hermeneutics and exegesis, as well as the forms of government within the churches.

³ It has been remarked by many that the last 100 years have been occupied with the endeavours of liberalism, and in its name it has proved to be the bloodiest century of all human history. In the name of the freedom of the human spirit millions of human lives have been 'liquidated' and it would appear that this will continue to be the case.

meant freedom from any kind of restraint, the opportunity to develop human capacities along the best lines, and a supra-archival situation—that is, a non-hierarchical environment—in which humankind can enjoy unrestricted progress and amity. One hesitates to even use the word 'autonomous living' because it, too, indicates some kind of rule, and the idea of rule is abhorrent to present liberalism of the social kind. Present humanism has, as its basis, living which is autonomous from God, and the human systems of ruling which are said to 'emanate from above', that is, hierarchical systems.

What we hope to do in this Section is not so much to attack present liberalism, as to present the biblical view of authority, and show that, being ontological, it cannot be outmoded, outdated and superseded by other structures and systems. History has shown Man's experiments and endeavours in the systems of human rule, such as autocracy, monarchy, oligarchy, democracy, socialism and communism.⁴

HUMAN GOVERNMENTAL AUTHORITY

We might use the term 'civil authority', meaning forms of government outside those which are religious, but it is doubtful whether many countries are 'secular', for

⁴ These systems are the subject matter of political history and political science, and require appropriate research. Discussing systems in the abstract or assessing them either critically or uncritically cannot conduct us to valid conclusions. We must contextualise the systems used in history and evaluate them in the widest perspective of that history. We need to evaluate them as objectively as possible—a difficult matter, given our humanity and its many hidden agenda.

even Communist countries virtually have Communism as their religion. The fact is that most—if not all—nations are religious. Islamic countries, for the most part, base their politics on the tenets of Islam. Even though some Islamic countries nominate themselves as ‘secular’, yet in reality the moving power is Islam. In India the primary power is Hinduism, although it is technically a secular State. Western States are viewed by Third-World countries as being Christian. The Indo-Chinese countries are primarily Buddhist, and Buddhism is the driving force of these States, since religion is the rallying point for much nationalism.

When we approach government from a biblical point of view,⁵ we have to do so keeping in mind that Man is made in the image of God—that he is ‘the image and glory of God’, that the God in whose image he is made is Triune and that that Godhead has within it a sociality which is related to the differentiations of the Persons. This relational Godhead is a hierarchy⁶ of Persons

⁵ I am aware that the statement ‘from a biblical point of view’ seems to be an arrogant one. Is there—as such—a biblical point of view on human government? I believe there is, and although it will be called ‘Judaic-Christian’ by some and so be looked upon as one governmental form among many, yet I believe there is an ontology of government within the Scriptures. It is closely linked with the nature of the Triune Godhead, the order and relationships within that Godhead, and with the domestic familial system which in turn has to do with the family of nations. Today it seems to be assumed that the Judaic-Christian form of government-authority has always been patriarchal, and that this patriarchy has always been oppressive. This, in fact, may not be the case. The assertion certainly needs to be examined critically.

⁶ We will be examining the whole matter of hierarchy, including the flow *downwards* from the Father throughout the entity. For the moment the reader should suspend presuppositions which make hierarchy *per se* a dark and dominant entity. These presuppositions relate more to the autocracy of the Father and the (presupposed) oligarchical nature of the Three Persons.

whilst being a Unity within Himself. This pluralist element of the Godhead must be repeated within the personhood of a human, as also the extrinsic relationships which obtain within the Trinity must be repeated with the *imago Dei*—the image of God in Man. What we must avoid doing is working back to the principle of government⁷ from the *praxis* of early Man, the Patriarchs and the Covenantal government of Israel as reported to us in the Scriptures.

THE FAMILIAL GOVERNMENT

God being Father, and—in one sense—the Godhead being familial, we ought to start at the family before we consider the tribal or ‘people’ situation. Both, of course, are mutually dependent, and both mutually interactive, so that it is difficult to know where to start. Also, making the statement that the Godhead is familial may seem confusing. To our thinking, a family has a husband, a wife and children. However, the human family is not analogous of the Godhead, since God is One, and the Fatherhood and the Sonship—as also the Spirithood—do not fit with our familial analogy. Because the

⁷ We must take account of human sinfulness when it comes to the matter of *praxis*, even if a total ontological understanding were present. Romans 1:18–25 should tell us that Man—even Man-in-faith (cf. Heb. 11:4ff.)—effects more a provisional than an ontological *praxis*. Just as we are reluctant to place too much credence on Job’s counsellors because of their faulty reasoning, so we must not confuse the *praxis* of the people of God in history with the ontological reality; that is, we must not work back from the *praxis* to the principle. Often we may have a *de facto* situation which, of course, is not *de jure*.

Persons as a familial entity do not comport with our idea of family does not put them out of court. Indeed we have to learn from the Godhead as to the true nature of familial being and relationships. We understand family as father, mother and child (children). Father is male, mother female, children are male and (or) female.

Jesus' statement in Matthew 23:9, 'And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven', shows us we should not work from human fatherhood to Divine Fatherhood. Thus, when the Scriptures use the term 'Father' for God, it must be other than human fatherhood. Also, when the masculine 'He', 'Him' and 'His' are used of God, it cannot mean the same as the earthly 'he', 'him' and 'his'.⁸ Nor does a qualitative and quantitative extension of these arrive at what God is. We are forced to use the gender terms 'Father', and 'He', 'Him' and 'His', but we must not think of Him in this way in terms of human gender. God is not human, and so He is not male in the way we understand male. He is Creator and not procreator. Man—the man–woman entity—is made in His image so that in some sense God is male–female, but not in the human ways we know male and female, or male–female.⁹ As Creator He has no sexuality.

Not by analogy

⁸ Statements from Isaiah—'I am God, and there is none like me', 'Who is like me? Let him proclaim it', 'To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One', 'To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?'—forbid us using analogy with the confidence that God is like the analogue. Thus to attribute to God the elements of Man in any way is to inhibit true knowledge of God, especially that which comes by revelation.

⁹ The difficulty some writers have is trying to parallel in God the androgynous nature they say that Adam had before Eve was created from him. Their argument is that by analogy God is androgynous. Since *andros* (*aner*: man and *gune*: woman)—from which the word androgynous is derived—are both human, that means they cannot be used even analogously of God. In one sense it may appear to be correct to speak of God as Male–Female, but since we do not know what is 'Male' and what is 'Female' on the level of Deity, then it is best for us not to use the terms. On this basis all masculist claims for God's masculinity and all feminist arguments against such masculinity, or in criticism of it, are groundless.

but by revelation we are conducted to a different understanding of male–female. The statements, 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created *him*; male and female he created *them*', and 'Male and female he created *them*, and he blessed *them* and named *them* Man when *they* were created', must mean that a human male apart from a human female is not Man, nor is a woman apart from a man truly the image of God. Together, and as 'one-flesh', they constitute the *image* of God, but not, of course, His actual Being.

In order to understand the place of male and the place of female on the human level, we must see that the first Man was created as Man, but with the creation of Woman out of him, Man was now man–woman, and is so, always. When we consider the male, we must always think of the woman as being 'bone of his bones, and flesh of his flesh'; that is, *she* is not to be thought of apart from *him*, nor *he* apart from *her*. When we seek to understand the relationship that exists between the two, we must think in terms of his *prior* being and of her having her *source* and *origin* in him, and from him. Some modern New Testament scholars take the statement 'the husband is the head of the wife' (Eph. 5:23) to mean that he is the source and origin of woman. In the Triune Godhead the Father is the head of Christ the Son (I Cor. 11:3), as Christ is the head of the man

(husband), who is the head of the woman (wife). To say that the head and the body are on parity cannot be true. As to their humanity—that is, as to being *human*—there is equality, but as to function and status the term ‘equality’ is irrelevant. In function the Father is prior to the Son, but as to nature, that is, Deity, they are one.¹⁰ Jesus could say that ‘the Father is greater than I’, and ‘I and the Father are one’, and in these two statements there was no contradiction. ‘Deriving’ and ‘being derived’ are not incompatible, but compatible; both are aspects of oneness. In this sense the Father has authority over the Son, and the man has authority over the woman.

Only when we see and understand this do we understand the Pauline and Petrine statements about man and woman, about husband and wife (cf. I Cor. 11:3–12; 14:33–37; Eph. 5:21–33; Col. 3:18; I Tim. 2:11–15; I Pet. 3:1–7). Neither Paul nor Peter are saying that a man is prior to a woman in regard to nature, but is prior in regard to creation—to source and origin—and so is prior to her in the hierarchical order. Thus we say that a man is prior to a woman as regards function, but not as regards nature. Both persons are human, but their functions and differentiations make them different, though not so as to make them incompatible, and not so

¹⁰ Notice that I avoid using the term ‘equal’, since the terms ‘equal’ and ‘unequal’ are terms not of quality but measurement. If we seek to measure people or creatures quantitatively and qualitatively, we will not be successful because of the innate (ontological) differentiations in all persons, and no less the Persons of the Trinity. The Father cannot be as the Son. Fatherhood and sonship are differentiations, but differentiations, far from unequalising the Persons, are elements of their unity, of their true sociality.

as to make one *better* than the other. Paul is really saying that for a woman to have authority over a man is unontological, and not that it is an impossibility. Peter is saying that for a woman to submit to her husband is ontological and part of the unity of love—a principle with which Paul clearly agrees.

Discursus on Equality, Ordination, Subordination, Superiority and Inferiority

I believe it is part of our fallen humanity never to admit that priority in function—that is, priority in the hierarchy—is *not* superiority. Whilst a person who is secondary to another in a hierarchy may insist on the equality of all persons within that hierarchy, yet that person will think that he or she has been placed in an inferior position and is therefore regarded as inferior.¹¹ This is a subjective evaluation. No person is greater—or lesser—in *nature* than another, though one may be prior to the other in *function*. To be superordinate does not mean that the one being superordinate is superior, and to be subordinate does not mean that the one being sub-ordinate is inferior. Experience has taught me that what I have here set out will be utterly ignored when it comes

¹¹ I believe this inability to think dispassionately on nature and function and to reject ideas of superiority and inferiority is because of the strong pressure to prove, justify and establish oneself. I believe that behind all of this is guilt, and guilt makes a person feel inferior. Existential guilt—guilt at not being a full ontological creature in a world created in perfection—is even more conducive to feeling inferior than is the guilt which accrues from wrong actions—sins of commission and omission. Competition to get to what we call ‘the top’ becomes the curse of the human race, the basis of enmity and hatred, and the continuing cause of personal, national and international conflict of every kind.

to the situation of priority and posterity in hierarchical systems. The teaching of Christ on the last being the first, the servant being the greatest—that is, the least being the most—is a teaching which may be under-stood noetically but which is not honoured in the action. To be served and not to serve always seems to be the human order. If the present masculinist–feminist debates¹² regarding equality and ability could be conducted in the light of function and not nature within hierarchical situations, then some kind of amity might be achieved. We have yet to examine the nature and operations of hierarchy, but I believe they will only confirm what we have said regarding the value and necessity of priority and posterity.

A Brief Discursus Regarding Hierarchy

Because so much of my argument relates to hierarchy, I would like to tender a brief explanation of it, waiting until later to deal with it at greater length, especially when the context is more fitting. I have been using the word ‘hierarchy’ through these studies, know-ing that it is disliked by many, and even offensive to some. That is why some kind of rationalisation of the structure should be attempted. The term ‘hierarchy’ for many today is one of opprobrium, especially for those living in an egalitarian situation with an egalitarian way

¹² The opposite to ‘feminism’ is ‘masculism’; that is, as ‘feminism’ is the assertion of female primacy, so ‘masculism’ is the assertion of masculine primacy. The masculinist–feminist debate differs from, (i) one gender emphasis as in homosexuality and lesbianism, and (ii) the same application of the two genders as functionally essential and supplying complementarity.

of thinking. Seeing hierarchies in biblical perspective, I would say that each hierarchy *is a dynamic social entity of love which is purposive and functional in the will of God, so that all relationships are in unity and are essential to the true working—and outworking—of the entity and the fulfilment of God’s will.* I recognise that this is not the way some hierarchies really are, and I am sure that my description will come as a surprise, and that readers will be incredulous. Without even examining the statement in depth, some will conclude that it is unreal, idealistic and utopian.

I do not believe this to be the case. I believe that true hierarchy is at the one time both relational and purposive, and that, this being so, it provides the motive and the drive for accomplishing its goal. Far from being a static entity imposed from above and oppressive by nature, I believe it is one of the most liberating and creative entities that we can know, and I hope to show this as we proceed in our study. One of the keys to understanding hierarchy is to see that the most prior within its order is the person who takes the highest responsibility and who must serve the most. Another key is the fact that each member of the hierarchy is in another. For example, in I Corinthians 11:3 the Father is in the Son, and the Son in the Father. The Son is in the husband, and the husband in him. The husband is in the wife and the wife in the husband, and in fact every member of the hierarchy is in every other member. This inter-dwelling of the members ensures unity, and works against the principle of oppression.

If we can understand both hierarchy and the fact that superordination does not mean superiority, then we should be able to examine familial and civil governments.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Humanity and the Authority of God—II

THE FAMILIAL GOVERNMENT (CONT.)

The Human Family—Especially Under Covenant¹

The human family in patriarchal times and in Israel was not simply what we call ‘the nuclear family’, that is, the parents and children, but it was understood to be all living relatives: from grandparents (and even great-grandparents) down to the last grandchild or great-grandchild; not only parents, brothers and sisters, but also embracing aunts and uncles, cousins and in-laws. Families were hierarchies, and if we understand the

¹ The systems of authority that we are studying are mainly covenantal; that is, God is the hierarchical Head of the people. We recognise that today’s world does not generally live under covenant. Even so, the Christian community is a people under the New Covenant, and it is reasonable to research what obtained under the covenant with Israel. It may well be that much of the structure in the former covenant is closest to what we call ‘ontological’, and in any case constitutes a good point of reference without being a binding legalistic pattern.

principle of functionality, then we will see that the primary authority in the family was—and is now—the father.² With him—because they are ‘one flesh’ (Gen. 2:24) and she is his helpmate (Gen. 2:18)—stands the wife. Together they are to fulfil the mandate of Genesis 1:28 to be fruitful, to multiply and fill up the earth, to subdue that earth and accomplish dominion over it. That is, marriage is not simply coming together for ‘the mutual society, help and comfort that the one ought to have of the other’, but it is for procreation of children, and this is part of the wider mandate. In other words, marriage is a vocation. Being husband and wife is vocational. It is with a view to fulfilling the will of God, whatever the personal vocations of the couple may be.

If we would understand the earthly human family, we must understand the Divine family. We must understand first the true nature of woman (the female) and man (the male), and then the functional nature of their union in marriage.³ As we suggested in chapter 6, we need to understand the human father by first understanding the Divine Father. Likewise, in order to

² We are talking here of what was a patriarchal society. In history there have been matriarchal societies, societies which were polygamous and polyandrous. If we take Romans 1:18–25 seriously this should not surprise us, since the human race—apart from people of faith—rebelled against the creational order as given by God (e.g. Gen. 1:28; cf. 2:18–24). Patriarchal society is often condemned out of hand by some sociologists, and we need to do serious research to see whether such condemnation is justified. It might even be that such patriarchy—given that it may have been abused and misused by males within it—is in fact the ontological society *par excellence*! Such research would need to include knowing the true nature of the male *qua* male and the female *qua* female.

³ For my understanding of these and other human relationships see my *God’s Glory, Man’s Sexuality* (NCPI, 1988), and *The Heavenly Vision* (NCPI, 1987).

understand a husband, we must first understand the true Husband, Christ. So, also, we must understand the human bride via the ontological brideship of the Bride, the Church. Biblical anthropology differs from scientific anthropology in that it has a revelational disclosure of God and Man,⁴ and so of all Divine and human as also Divine–human relationships. Only in the light of these can we come to know the essential family.⁵

The children are to honour the parents, and there appear to be descending orders of priority in the children as brothers and sisters.⁶ The stories of first and second sons, such as Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, show us the priority of the elder

⁴ Science is the gathering of knowledge of things as they are, and applied science is the using of that knowledge for practical purposes. The essential nature of things—especially of God and humanity—is the realm of theology and theological anthropology. To speak, for example, of patriarchy is to report on the system, its benefits, losses, advantages and harmful effects, but science cannot penetrate to the essential nature of that hierarchy. Patriarchy cannot be said to have been an absolute rule by the father—or men—because of the union of the wife with the husband. Nor was it an oligarchy of man and wife ruling the children, since their relational situation—especially under covenant—was for the family hier-archy to begin with God and descend to the youngest child in a course of relationships. This gives meaning to, as well as draws meaning from, the local context, and especially the relational and governmental system of covenant.

⁵ We emphasise again that we are not demanding the perfection of the true—ontological—family. This pressure of ontological necessity is a fearful demand to fulfil. We are simply saying that this is how families are, and that we can comprehend the Divine family and so know how to set about true familyhood, even if we do not succeed, as succeed we will not in a fallen world, no matter how dynamic grace may be.

⁶ In saying ‘there appear to be’ we mean primarily in the patriarchal and Judaic–Christian cultures, although there is evidence that this is generally so in many societies and cultures.

brother, only changed by sovereign grace in some cases. Our intention here is not to cover the laws regarding priority and inheritance, but simply to show the hierarchical nature of the family. It is to be seen that the modern idea of individualistic independence of children from their parents and one another was not in the patriarchal order. The father was the head of the family, and the parents together were to be honoured.⁷ Children could never be ‘homeless’ as in our modern setting, for they just did not leave home. Marriage partners were chosen by the parents, and young men and women did not live away from the family. The father trusted the new husband at marriage, giving over his daughter to him. Covenantal patriarchy was protective of women and children.

Families did not exist as separate and individualistic entities. This is shown by judgments wrought upon families rather than persons, as in the case of Achan and his family (Josh. 7). Deuteronomy 21:18–21 stated, ‘If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son, who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they chastise him, will not give heed to them’, then the parents are to report this to the elders of the city, and ‘Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall purge the evil from

⁷ Honouring is a relational pattern that is dynamic for human living. Romans 1:21 shows that failure to honour God was linked with man’s rebellion against Him. Likewise failure to ‘honour all men’, to ‘honour the king’, to ‘honour the wife’, to ‘honour the genuine widow’, virtually means failure to honour God by failing to honour those created in His image (cf. Prov. 14:31, ‘He who oppresses a poor man insults his Maker’). To honour parents does not simply mean to obey them—though this may well be involved. Honouring the parents is a relational matter of the deepest order.

your midst; and all Israel shall hear, and fear'. Families, then, were closely knit within the covenant community.

The Community and Its Elders

Eldership is an ancient authority-structure existing long before the creation of Israel. It was assumed—fairly reasonably—that the older men were those who had gathered wisdom, so that from them were selected the wisest. If we can talk about archetypal elders, then they would be the twenty-four elders of the Book of the Revelation. We know that the seventy elders have a history of selection during the forty years in the wilderness. Each of the tribes of Israel had its elders, and the seventy were drawn from them. They were the leaders in taking the initiative of judgment and execution of judgment, such as stoning the rebellious child, the breaker of the Sabbath, the false prophet who led the people into idolatry—and so on. They were to lead the people in wisdom.⁸ If we read the Pauline criteria for elders (presbyters, overseers, bishops) in the New Testament, then it is probably the criteria which have always obtained. By the same reasoning Paul's injunctions (criteria for) the 'elder women' in Titus 2:3–5 were the same in Israel. The familial injunctions in I Timothy 5:1–6 and in Titus 2:1–10 would be those which had obtained under the former covenant.

⁸ Whilst the term 'wisdom' is not much used in regard to the elders, it is surely assumed. Proverbs 11:14 says, 'Where there is no guidance, a people falls; but in an abundance of counsellors there is safety'. Doubtless the thought of elders is present here. It is also useful to notice that wisdom was the key to such counselling, hence Solomon's request to God for wisdom.

The community of Israel was one people, but it also had a vocation; that is, to be the priest nation among—and for—all nations (Exod. 19:5–6). It was a theocracy and so a Divine hierarchy, or a hierarchy which commenced from God, its monarchy being one delegated by God the King, and its people a nation under monarchical government in consultation with the elders who, in turn, represented the families of the whole community. I Peter 2:9, 10 equates the church with the holy people of Israel, so that in the New Covenant the church is the priest-people among, and for, all other peoples. It is in the light of these parallels that we ought to understand the matter of authority in the church, that is, ecclesial authority.

ECCLESIAL AUTHORITY

Our treatment of familial structures and relationships in the covenant under which Israel lived—including the government of Israel as a theocracy, beginning with the monarch and proceeding to the elders and heads of families, parents, children and slaves—should prepare us for our study of ecclesial authority.

The primary point we have to note is that, whilst Israel had a covenantal polity in which God was regarded as Covenant-Father,⁹ the church has an altogether new

⁹ The term 'Covenant-Father' does not appear in the OT, but the concept does. Just about all references to God as Father have to do with covenant. This is seen as we study each reference, even to those which seem to speak of Him as Creator (Isa. 64:8; Mal. 2:10). The ideas of 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ', and 'our God and Father' are not explicitly present in the OT. This means that there is a great difference in the understanding and practice of authority in the two Testaments.

revelation of God as Father. Certainly the polity of the first covenant flows on to the second, but not without changes. There appear to be two forms of external authority;¹⁰ that is, firstly Christ as Lord, and secondly the elders as those who rule and lead in the church. Linked with both are two more elements, namely the *domata*¹¹ and the *charismata*, that is, the gifts of ministry (*domata*) and the charismatic gifts. Probably we cannot distinguish between the two. In any case they are not only the gifts *from* Christ, but the gifts which *are* Christ. In Romans 6:23 the gift (*charisma*) of God is eternal life, yet this eternal life is Christ himself (cf. I John 5:12). In Christ are all the gifts, constituting the ‘fullness’ which Christ gives to his church (Eph. 1:23; cf. Col. 1:19; 2:3, 9, 10), so that the gifts are personally given, in which case Christ the Lord is the giver of them, as the Holy Spirit is the distributor and guide of their use. All, then, is under Christ—the Lord.

A question we may ask is whether the *domata* of Ephesians 4:8ff. are in themselves a hierarchy of gifts. That is, are the gifts dependent on one another in hierarchical order: the apostle being the primary gift, the prophet being next and so on, but then the prophet

¹⁰ By ‘external authority’ we mean that as in Israel God was King, so in the New Covenant Christ is Lord of the church; as in the first covenant there was an eldership, so also there is an eldership in the New Covenant people.

¹¹ In Ephesians 4:8 the gifts—which are sometimes called ministerial gifts—are given by Christ and are called *domata*. Some scholars see the word *domata* as a grade above *charismata*. In I Corinthians 12:4ff. the gifts called *charismata* are associated with the Spirit who *distributes* rather than gives. In I Corinthians 12:28–30, Paul speaks of God appointing those whose ministries correspond to the *domata*—apostles, prophets, teachers—and then others whose actions are those of the *charismatic* donations.

somehow being subject to the apostle, and the evangelist subject to both of them, etc.? Certainly in I Corinthians 12:28–29 there is some sort of an order given. In both the Acts and the Epistles, the apostle is the leading figure, and it is possible—if not even probable—that in some way the prophet and the others were linked, for the outworking of their ministries, to the apostle. In Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5, the apostle and prophet are linked together in that order. If we could know that the gifts (*domata*) are hierarchical, it would help us to understand something of their outworking; that is, that gifts were not used in an *ad hoc* manner, but alongside other gifts and so in a definite order as they operated within the entity of the hierarchy.

Some support seems to be given to my theory advanced here in the statement in Hebrews that Christ is the ‘apostle and high priest of our confession’.¹² As the church looked to the apostle as the one alone whose revelation of the truth was primary, so, here, the church with Christ. In I Peter 5:1–3, Peter speaks about himself being a fellow elder with the elders to whom he writes, and then includes them as being fellow shepherds (the true meaning of elder), but sees them, with himself, as being under the leadership of the ‘chief Shepherd’, Christ.

¹² I have not seen the idea presented elsewhere; that is, that the *domata* constitute a hierarchy. Rather, there seems to be the curious idea that anyone could independently exercise such gifts. As the elders are not *said* to control the use of gifts, one wonders who administered their use as, for example, set out in I Corinthians 14. If they operated within a hierarchical discipline then that would explain their true use. I Corinthians 14:32—‘the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets’—speaks of a mutuality of control within the order of the prophets but does not refer to the other *domata*. Even so, this does not invalidate my theory.

The Leadership of the Elders

The elders are the key to the outworking of ministry within the church, as also to its external ministry. As we have observed, there would be nothing new or strange if elders followed the criteria of selection and the operations of elders in Israel. Certainly the elders of the church and those of the synagogue seem to be similar. It appears that in 'old Israel' and the new community women were not elders. This would be explained by the primary place of a man in the human part of the hierarchy of God, Christ, the man and the wife—to which we might add the children. It is clear that both men and women had ministry (Eph. 4:12), so the ministry of women is not in question. Their leadership as elders is in question.

On any score it must be recognised that the church was not an egalitarian group, any more than we could say the Trinity is an egalitarian entity. Since the Son and the Spirit derive from the Father,¹³ and the Three Persons together constitute the Divine hierarchy, so the man and the woman constitute the human part of the hierarchy of I Corinthians 11:3. In marriage this is the case, as is clear from Ephesians 5:22f. The modern humanistic and egalitarian climate dissolves all such hierarchies, being scandalised by them. I have noted personally that those opposing hierarchies are often the most hierarchical when given positions of authority—the very authority which they profess, in principle, to deny!

¹³ The Creeds speak of the Son and the Spirit proceeding from the Father, and the Spirit proceeding—in that order—from the Son. This *filioque* clause caused a split between the Western and Eastern (Orthodox) churches.

It is noticeable that academics often form their hierarchy so that the best equipped academically take precedence over lesser persons in their disciplines.

The eligibility of elders,¹⁴ that is, their criteria for election, as also their functions, are set out in passages such as Acts 20:17–32; I Timothy 3:1–7; 5:17–20; Titus 1:5–9; and I Peter 5:1–4, to which we may add all references to the twenty-four elders in the Book of the Revelation. A close study of the qualifications for elders will indicate not only the qualities required, but also the abilities the elders need in order to carry out their pastoral work. In particular we have references in I Thessalonians 5:12–13, and Hebrews 13:7 and 17, which are now set out in order:

But we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith.

Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account. Let them do this joyfully, and not sadly, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Our view of the early church is often conditioned by seeing some of the polities which have formed them-selves in various churches—particularly denominations—over the centuries. Unfortunately we tend to read some of the less acceptable features back into the polity

¹⁴ I am dealing quite thinly with the qualifications and ministry of elders but an expansion of these elements can be found in studies on eldership. I cite my own monograph *Shepherds of the Flock* (NCPI, 1985).

and actions of the apostolic church. It is clear that the former covenant authority-structure had influence on the new community of Christ. If we forget the fact that Christ's Lordship was a prime element in the understanding of the church, and if we neglect the matter of the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit, then we do not understand the life of the community in unity, love and caring which—given in its faults and failures—presented an entirely new community to the world. The church was a remarkable miracle, and—for that matter—still is. As in all cases where practical authority exists, that authority has its vitality, operations and fruits in the onward-going action of the entity. The church on mission is scarcely aware of its authority-structure, since such a structure is intended to be functional. On the move, everything has its rightful expression; being static, the structure becomes burdensome, tending to seem oppressive, and its demands appear legal.

A good study for us is that of the first council at Jerusalem (Acts 15). The cause of the council was the demand of some Pharisees that Gentile converts be circumcised. Paul and Barnabas had recounted 'all that God had done with them' on the first missionary journey. The apostles and the elders gathered together to consider the matter. The assembly heard the evaluation of the missionary journey by the apostles and elders. James—not one of the apostles, but the leading elder of the church of Jerusalem—drew in scriptural evidence to show that the Gentiles should be included. He then gave his judgment, at which point the apostles and other elders, agreeing with James, gave their conclusion as to what ought to be done. They drew up a letter, which

was sent from 'the apostles and the elders, with the whole church'. The structure was both functional and dynamic.

CONCLUSION TO FAMILIAL, ECCLESIAL AUTHORITIES

Whilst many readers may be interested in the authority-structures which obtained for families and society in covenant-Israel and for the apostolic church as the New Covenant community, they may nevertheless wonder why this has been explained, and ask what relevance it has for today. Our answer to this is that what is given to a covenant society may well be changeless, even though adaptive. It may be the closest we can know to that which is ontological, and so may well be relevant for today and essential for true living.

Today we have certain values, certain anthropological understandings which lead us to change our mores—our cultural patterns of living—and to think in what we call 'more enlightened ways', but these may not necessarily be the ways we should go about our operations for living and for moulding our society. It would be easy for us to be critical of the changes in society, just as it might be simple enough to rationalise them as good. Even so we are faced, pragmatically, with what has happened in these years: the vast breakdown in the family (should we abandon the family?); the breakdown in marriage (should we abandon the system of marriage?); the vast increase of homeless children in the streets (should we abandon the principle of having homes?); the rapid increase in drug taking and the

consequent rise in the crime rate (should we legalise drug taking and pacify the anger of a younger generation at the seeming failure of present Government?).

We can no longer take for granted our easy humanism, the abandoning of sexual principles of morality, the outlawing of all forms of discrimination, when so many of them, anyway, are not discrimination, although this is how they are named. I, with many others, believe that we have not been conservative enough; that is, we have not conserved that which is good, giving way as we have to the radical liberators who in many cases have landed us into a more oppressive bondage than the ones we knew.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Question of Authority

MAN AND AUTHORITY

What authority may Man look to? Under what authority should he live and act? These are questions which are often asked by human beings. The life of autonomy is not an easy one to live. A life lived outside any authority is a life lived under one's own authority, that is, an existence of autonomy. Whether this is, in fact, possible, or whether one can take a wholly existential approach, is in question. In the biblical system of authority, Man is not Man unless he is wholly under the authority of God the King and so is a member of the Kingdom of God and His Christ.

Strong have been the debates as to the supreme authority in human experience; that is, whether God is to be acknowledged as the supreme authority, and if so, then how does He communicate that authority? Another question is that of the authority of Man; that is, is Man's reason the dependable authority under which he

can—and ought to—live? Can the human race discover and exercise the powers which would thus make it authoritative in its world? Again, can it be claimed—as it has been claimed—that the church is *the* authority for faith and practice, and, if so, how does it hold and exercise such authority? These are questions which have exercised the human race from time to time. Authority as the unrestricted power to accomplish what the will desires is a true description of God's authority. For Man this description is a fascinating thought and a dynamic motive for achievement of such freedom. Whether or not Man can achieve it is another matter.

APPROACHING THE MATTER OF AUTHORITY

Where do we start in our quest to understand true authority, and along what lines may we proceed? P. T. Forsyth gives a valuable insight—even a direction—in regard to the knowledge of authority. Writing in the prologue to his book *The Principle of Authority*, he points out that it is only in the experience of a relationship with God that the matter of authority comes through to us, to a person. This would certainly be true wherever we wish to know and understand authority. For this reason it would be helpful for us to read Forsyth's book, much of which sounds quite strange to us in a liberal age. It may be more true to say his words act as a cold douche on us where our view of God's greatness and His holiness has been foreshortened, where it lacks humility and in so doing would lessen the dignity of God:

The conviction in these pages is that the principle of authority is ultimately the whole religious question, that an authority of any practical kind draws its meaning and its right only from the soul's relation to its God, that this is so not only for religion strictly so called, nor for a Church, but for public life, social life, and the whole history and career of Humanity. Society cannot be founded on sympathy alone, but upon right. No amount of fraternity will preserve it; but fraternity itself rests on due and true authority, brotherhood on fatherhood. The doctrine of the divine right of kings was wrong only in the form of kingship. Society does mean sovereignty, even if it be the sovereignty of the people (however the people may be defined). And sovereignty draws its right to claim obedience only from the Sovereignty of God, conceived concretely, as He reveals His will in history that it should be conceived. All the authority essential in an ordered society or state has its right in proportion to its proximity to, or charter from, the last authority of all. And that is an authority to be appreciated and ordered only by the soul. The religious authority at last settles all things. All questions run up into moral questions; and all moral questions centre in the religious, in man's attitude to the supreme ethic, which is the action of the Holy One. We must all start with something given, something imposed. We create neither truth nor right. Is the Giver a blind power inferior in dignity to our rational will? Or is it the Holy One bestowing, from the least gift to the greatest, His own holiness, and establishing His own righteousness, in a love whose true response is not merely our reciprocity but our obedience?¹

Having established the point that we come to authority through the soul, and when we do we find God is the first and the last authority, and that authority is a thing given and received, Forsyth has stinging words for those of us who imagine we create or dissolve authority and authorities:

¹ Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*, pp. 2–3.

There is no social future without authority. Yet we have come to a pitch when liberty threatens to go to pieces of its own momentum, like a racing fly-wheel where they have shot the engineer. And there is no authority without a religion—none for Humanity without the religion of Humanity. And the religion of Humanity is not a mood of the widest fraternity, nor a cult in which mankind worships itself. It means a God, and a God not of benevolence but of holiness, who treats the unholy with the right, the judgment, and the grace which are after all our commanding ideals, and which are making the New Humanity in Jesus Christ. The one practical authority for human society is the God who in Christ comes in such judging and redeeming action that we are no more our own at all. If we will be as thorough as the soul or its God, that is the only authority which at bottom sanctions a social order even about drains, justifies a fellow creature's committal to jail for twenty-four hours, mulcts him of a shilling, or which at its height provides him with a throne and a loyalty that make public order a spiritual hierarchy, liberty a sacred passion, patriotism noble, sacrifice divine and obedience a pride.²

Forsyth is saying that we can only understand authority when we understand God, when we see Him as establishing authority in the soul through the saving act that works upon it. There is, then, no secular authority, since all authority stems from God, and all human action is significant and authentic under that authority. When we would examine the authorities or the forms of authority we have asked questions about (above), then it must be in that spirit—that is, of humility, of being under God's authority—that we must do our research. We will now look afresh at the authority of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and God as the Triune God), of the church, and the authority of Man, especially

² Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*, pp. 3–4.

in regard to his place in the universe and the value of his reasoning.

KNOWING THE AUTHORITIES

When we say that we know authority, not as an abstraction or a system but as *God*, and when we say that we know it in the soul—that is, we are subject to that Authority for all of life and action—we are not saying that our knowledge of God, and so of Him as authority, is only a subjective one. It may well be that our *response* to the revelation of God will be subjective, but that subjective response is not itself the measure of the reality of God or of His authority. Experience of God and authority neither validates nor invalidates that which in itself is objective. The Roman centurion lived in the authority of the Roman army and knew its reality without being concerned with the metaphysics of authority. He certainly knew the principle of authority; that is, that when one is subject to authority and moves in the line of authority, then that functional authority will honour that obedience and effect the commands of the one subject to it.

The Authority of the Triune God

We have already said that God's authority lies within Himself, that it is expressed in creation³ and expressed

³ 'He commanded and they were created' (Ps. 148:5), 'For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it [creation] stood forth' (Ps. 33:9). His word in Genesis 1 is what brings all into being. The Son is creator, as is seen in John 1:1ff.; Colossians 1:16; 1 Corinthians 8:5; and Hebrews 1:1–2. Psalm 104:30 says, 'When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created', and the Spirit was present, moving across the deep, in Genesis 1. Creation, like all other elements of the Kingdom of God, is Trinitarian.

as part of His Kingdom.⁴ The Father, the Son and the Spirit were present and active in creation—active together. We have noted in chapter 1 the authority of the man Jesus. Without going into the theology of his being ‘Son of Man’, ‘Immanuel’, ‘God with us’, the ‘second’ or ‘last Adam’ (cf. Rom. 5:12–21; I Cor. 15:21, 22, 45–50),⁵ we know that through the Cross, Resurrection and Ascension he was not only ‘declared to be the Son of God with power’, but also acclaimed as Lord. We saw he was authoritative—uniquely authoritative—in his earthly life, having been given authority to forgive sins, having authority over the elements such as the wind and the waves, over all demonic forces—even Satan himself—and was Lord of the Sabbath. He had authority to lay down his life and to take it again. He spoke with authority—‘No man ever spoke like this man’—and yet in all this he was under the authority of the Father. He was also under the authority of the Holy Spirit, being conceived of the Spirit, led of the Spirit and empowered by the Spirit. We have also seen that in his ascension he was raised above every power and made to

⁴ God’s Kingdom is simply His reign and rule. Our ideas of a kingdom having location and perimeters is not that of the Kingdom of God. God’s rule is dynamic, effecting His will, and it is over all things. We cannot talk of ‘extending God’s Kingdom’, since it is over all, but we can talk of rational creatures, who have rebelled against His Kingdom, repenting and submitting to Him.

⁵ Our purpose here is not to set forth a full Christology, but simply to point to those terms or offices which designate him in the position of authority.

be Lord of all, Lord over all—a fact which delineates him not only as Messiah, but as the one who wins the nations (Ps. 2:5ff.; Rev. 19:15ff.). As the Lamb of God he shares the throne with the Father.⁶

The Lordship of the Father and the Son in the Kingdom of God (cf. Eph. 5:5; Rev. 11:15; I Cor. 15:24–28) is also linked with the Lordship of the Spirit (II Cor. 3:17–18), who is the Spirit of life. As the Father is Judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25), and yet has committed all judgment to the Son (John 5:22–29; Acts 10:42; 17:31; cf. II Cor. 5:10), so the Spirit is the Spirit of burning and judgment (Isa. 4:4; 11:4; II Thess. 2:8).

Opposition to the Authority of the Triune God

It can scarcely be missed—in history—that celestial and terrestrial creatures seek to escape from their places in the creational hierarchy—as also the creational sub-hierarchies—and endeavour to set up their own kingdoms. Satan—a son of God and nominated as Lucifer—would, as with the king of Babylon, ‘set his throne above the stars of God’, or like the king of Tyre be perfect in all his ways until corruption—the corruption of vanity and heady ambition—was to be found in him. Created Man, too, desired to be *as* God; that is, to take a step beyond being *like* God so that he would be *as* God,

⁶ In Revelation chapter 5, verse 12, he is the only one in all heaven and earth who is qualified and competent to open the seven-sealed book. Because of this he receives universal worship and adoration and receives that worship which is accorded elsewhere only to God, for ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!’ (cf. 4:11).

that is, become a god. The day of the fall of Man was the birthday of humanism—a system which became explicit in such individualists as Cain, Lamech, Nimrod, Nebuchadnezzar and others, and a corporate autonomous system separating itself from dependence upon God. Ideologies and politics have sought to evade the supreme authority—God—and set up their own surrogate authorities, often in the name of ‘no authority’. This is particularly noticeable in humanistic systems which give out that they are for the freedom of the human spirit, as though there can be no freedom when under the authority of God. So we have ‘revolutions’ which ‘liberate’ us from ‘ruling juntas’—whether they be political, familial or ecclesial—and bring us into free living. We have liberty from oppressive puritanical sexual bondage⁷ and, indeed, any kind of restriction that irks the modern spirit. History has a way not only of having the moral pendulum swing again towards moralism, but the liberating forces generally become excessively tyrannical as they substitute for God in the government of the ‘liberated’ peoples.

It is interesting to note that—to quote Lord Acton—‘Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely’. Evil is generally a facsimile of that which

⁷ It appears that the Puritans enjoyed most pleasures of life, and sex was looked upon generally as a beautiful gift of God which they enjoyed. They all also enjoyed alcoholic drinks, the *Mayflower* being said to have carried an abundant supply of excellent beer! Jonathan Edwards and his wife both enjoyed smoking their pipes and reading the latest novels from Europe! The new—secular—puritanism is a fearful thing. Scarcely anything in this world may now be enjoyed, according to these new ‘warners’. They outdo the Puritans in doom and gloom, although in fact it was not true of the Puritans that they brought doom and gloom.

is good. The kingdom of Satan has its own evil trinity, its own evil authorities, imitating God’s plan for history as it seeks to capture the nations, and has its own ‘holy city’, that is, Babylon ‘the unholy city’. It demeans those it takes captive and sets out to convince the human race that the human body is obscene, that creation is a thing to be feared and that God is *the* Tyrant of the universe. Promising absolute liberty, Satan finishes up as the tyrant beyond all tyrants, as well as the father of them all!

The usefulness of this kind of digression is not to alarm but to show that we can eat and drink deceit and not be aware of the fact. We will not admit that we want to escape from God, and yet we convince ourselves that only apart from Him is there a wonderful kingdom, an exhilarating freedom, a glorious liberty. That is the lie that has left many desolate and wretched. It stands in stark and terrible contrast with the servant of God who cries to God out of conviction and experience, ‘I delight to do thy will, O my God!’.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIPTURES

Perhaps we should first have discussed the authority of Man, for whenever humans write literature of any kind, or produce art, sculpture and music, they tend to think that the mind that produced it is special and, perhaps, even infallible. There is often great trust in human reason and human inspiration.⁸ That is how some would

⁸ This is a curious fact: poets, songwriters, writers of fact and fiction—unless they are mature persons and artists—tend to dislike editing or any thought that their work needs correction or refining!

see the Bible—as a special and inspired work of art, but then there are degrees of difference in thinking in regard to the authority of the Scriptures. A good starting point for discussion of biblical authority is to begin with the apostolate of the early church, and examine the authority of the apostles.

The Authority of the Apostles

In Mark 3:13–14 we read that Jesus ‘called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach’. They needed to be with him in order to be taught, to learn by his words and actions, so that finally they could be sent out when the time was right. In Luke chapter 9 we see the twelve disciples sent out to preach the gospel of the Kingdom in the same way that Jesus preached it. They did so by way of delegated authority. Again, in Luke chapter 10, a further seventy disciples were similarly commissioned. This was in order that Jesus should cover Palestinian Israel with the message of the Kingdom.⁹ The commission to the twelve disciples¹⁰—now called ‘apostles’—was not given until after the Resurrection. In the closing sections of the four

⁹ Jesus did not seek to cover all Israel by himself. Doubtless there was an element of training in the cases of the twelve and of the seventy, but the prime aim was to ensure that all heard the gospel—whatever their response might be.

¹⁰ In fact Judas is not named among the twelve, the eleven apostles having elected Matthias to fill the empty position. It is clear that the number ‘twelve’ was significant. Scholars have puzzled over a thirteenth apostle, that is, Paul, some suggesting that the selection of Matthias was out of place. There can be no conclusive result of such an argument.

Gospels and in Acts 1:1–8 that commission is set out. One of the criteria of apostleship was that the person had seen the Lord—indeed had companied with him. Paul—so to speak—got in by the skin of his teeth. He had certainly seen the Lord¹¹—on the road to Damascus. He tells the Galatians that he received the gospel ‘through a revelation of Jesus Christ’ and recounts how God had ‘revealed his Son *in me*’. He spoke of himself as ‘an apostle by the will of God’.

No one but God has authority in himself. All authorities are delegated by God. Any authority which goes beyond the delegated commission is reprehensible and must ultimately face the judgment of God. Apostolic authority, then, did not reside in the apostles them-selves, but in the commission given to them. The work of an apostle was to interpret the events of Christ in the light of the Old Testament and the Old Testament in the light of the events of Christ, thus producing a new third creation—the gospel of Christ, the true good news of God.

Jesus had promised the disciples that they would be taught by the Spirit, who would also bring to their remembrance what he—Jesus—had previously taught them. The Spirit would glorify Christ by revealing the things of the Father and the Son. This happened to the eleven disciples at Pentecost, and to Paul on the road to Damascus and in the time when he was filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17; cf. I John 2:20f.). The apostles, then, had that truth—often called the apostolic

¹¹ In Acts 26:16–18 Paul tells of his commission by Christ to be an apostle, for he was ‘to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you’.

truth—and this was authoritative. This had nothing to do with personal infallibility—such as in the doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope—for their ministry was to witness to Christ, and not to be infallible theologians. Their ministry had to do with both faith and practice.¹² This is shown by the fact that Peter rebuked Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1ff.)—even to their death—but was later rebuked by the apostle Paul for his failure to eat with the (Christian) Gentiles (Gal. 2:11ff.).

Adolf Harnack has an interesting statement regarding the apostles and the inspiration of their writings:

The Holy Spirit and the Apostles became correlative conceptions, with the consequence that the Scriptures of the New Testament were indifferently regarded as composed by the Holy Spirit or the Apostles.¹³

In II Peter 3:14–16 the author of the Letter includes Paul's writings amongst the Scriptures. It is not our purpose here to try to prove the truth of the apostolic writings and their innate canonicity—such as exists with the Old Testament canon. If we concede the unique authority of the apostles, then we must also concede that their preaching and writings are in the same stream as the authority of the prophets who spoke from God (Heb. 1:1).

¹² Sometimes it appears that Paul is in a quandary as to making a decision related to Christian practice. For example, in I Corinthians 7:12 he says, 'To the rest I say, not the Lord...' He is simply saying there was no command or elucidation given by Christ, but as Christ's apostle he now speaks for Christ, that is, Christ is giving the command through him. Thus his statements in this case were fully authoritative.

¹³ The reference is to *The Origin of the NT* (ETH, 1925, p. 49).

The Nature of God's Word

This is a subject which needs close attention.¹⁴ If we separate the word from the Speaker, then it ceases to be the word—as such.¹⁵ God's word is itself dynamic, but then only because it issues from Him (Isa. 55:8–11; Heb. 4:12–13). The *time* of God's utterance has nothing to do with its continuing power. What God has spoken *He* has spoken, and so its dynamism does not fade away with time. The word which comes from Him cannot be separated from Him. It can never return to Him void. Humans may transmogrify the word, in which case it will no longer be the word. The word is nothing if not revelatory, but this is only in the presence of, and by the power of, the Holy Spirit. In Galatians 1:11–12 Paul says:

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

If this principle is extended to all Scripture, then it must mean that we are dependent upon God's revelation to know the truth. The word being the truth means that it is authoritative—not of itself, but because of

¹⁴ There are numerous publications and articles on the matter of the authority of the Bible. Moslems go very close to making a hypostasis of the Koran, and some Christians have a similar view regarding the Bible. In such cases there is a tendency to separate God from His word and words, the Scriptures become an entity in themselves, an authority in themselves, and harm can only result from such a view.

¹⁵ I suggest reading articles in my *For Pastors and the People* (NCPI, 1989). The section 'The Doctrine of the Word of God' should prove helpful.

God who has spoken it, and continues to speak it. We must keep in mind the fact that God and the word of God are one—there can be no separation of the two. Our primary contact with God is through His word. To believe the word and to give emphasis to it is not to be an idolater, but a worshipper of God. Not to hear His word and obey it is to defy God in the interests of our own autonomy—our so-called freedom.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH

It used to be said that the church gave the Bible to the world, but rather it is God who gave His word to His Church. The argument was that the Church was the monitor and arbitrator of the word; but that cannot be. The word is prior to the Church having brought it into being, and, as God has said:

*But this is the man to whom I will look,
he that is humble and contrite in spirit,
and trembles at my word.*

The Church is the body of Christ, and derives its life from him. In that sense Christ is prior to the Church. He is its head, its hierarchical head, but then only as he is under the Father.¹⁶ Christ has given the truth to the Church, but the truth is not apart from him, so that authority derives from Christ, the word and the Spirit. This is the authority the Church knows. Only as it

¹⁶ From time to time the Church seems to arrogate to itself the authority which alone belongs to Christ its head. As we keep saying, the Church must refer always to Christ. With him as its head the Church is authoritative.

clings to the word and obeys its Lord and is led by the Spirit does it exercise true authority.

The authority of the apostles was one which could not be questioned—even given in their imperfect human-ity. The post-apostolic period represents a problem to us who stand and live in time apart from the object; that is, given in that the apostles had authority, does that authority pass on to succeeding persons chosen to be apostles? The answer is, 'No! The apostolic truth has been stated in the New Testament Scriptures and is sufficient. It was not the truth of the apostles, but the truth given to the apostles'. Whilst there may be apostles of a secondary order in post-apostolic times, they are not as the original apostles. When James the apostle was killed by Herod, he was not replaced by another apostle.¹⁷ So there was no problem regarding authority in the post-apostolic age. The Church adhered to, and proclaimed, the apostolic truth. The Lord, the Holy Spirit and the word have always been present in the Church. Thus authority has always been present.

In our next chapter we will be using an essay to illustrate this whole matter.

¹⁷ We will have occasion to discuss the theory of 'Apostolic succession' and the matter of clerical hierarchy. This will be when we discuss the principle of hierarchy.

CHAPTER NINE

An Essay on Toby and Authority

A STORY ABOUT AUTHORITY

When I knew Toby as a boy, I liked him because of his careless and casual approach to life. Because I was being brought up in a home where there was a stern, righteous father who demanded the utter truth, and because we were never allowed excesses in anything—food, clothing, entertainment, talk, laughter, sport, hobbies and the like—I admired him with some envy for the fact that he could do what he liked, and he had no conscience about the matter. Well, he had no conscience about the matters I have just mentioned.

He did, in fact, have a conscience, and it was about conscience—his conscience anyway. He would never go against his conscience. In those days I knew nothing about William Temple's famous essay in *Essays and Reviews*. The essence of the essay was that no matter how much you have been informed ethically and morally by the Bible, and by Bible teachers, when your

conscience and your private interpretation of anything clash, then always make conscience the supreme interpreter. Follow your conscience. Having—since the days of my boyhood—done a fair bit of research concerning conscience, I wonder how William Temple could have said anything so asinine.

As I say, my friend, whom I here call 'Toby Crawley' — since he is still alive and may not like my mentioning his true name—was a person you might even call 'amoral', for to me he never seemed to see wrong in the things I was taught were wrong. Take, for example, eating. Instead of calling him Toby, I could well nickname him 'Tubby'. He ate what he liked, when he liked, and although I would never call him a glutton, I considered him excessive in what he ate. Take cream cakes or cream buns, for example. I would buy one with my pocket money about every four months, but he had them weekly and sometimes even daily.

I guess my parents today would be called pretty legalistic, even tyrannous, but I never saw them that way. We were all a pretty healthy lot—the whole nine children. Any sickness would be looked upon either as a sham—to get out of going to school—or it had resulted from doing something we ought not to have done. My mother also had a way of minimising her sickness. Secretly I wished that I could get sick. I had a yearning to be noticed among the nine, being in the middle of the bunch. One day my primary school teacher told me that I had the mumps: I had better go home, and not infect the other children. Mother said it was 'swollen glands'. I felt greatly cheated, especially as the teacher had to accept her word for it—my mother's word, she who knew nothing about sickness.

So much for my interruption in this story. Toby could have headaches whenever he liked them, especially when he had not done his homework, nor cheated off mine. He could laze about at home, and his conscience never worried him. Well, as I was saying, Toby was quite obedient to his conscience. What I did not know then is something I now know. Toby trained his conscience to be his interpreter in the way he wanted things interpreted. Take, for example, lying. Even now, when I remember back, I am amazed at how he could lie without a quiver of conscience. In this respect he was a natural Jesuit—without prejudice to the order of Ignatius Loyola. Their principle was ‘The end justifies the means’.

Well, Toby was fully versed in that principle. I think that for the most part I was free of lying; or, if not free, then I knew it was wrong to lie. My conscience would trouble me if I lied. Rather than trouble my conscience, which always then troubled me, I kept from lying. What is more, I was always troubled—even embarrassed—in the presence of someone lying. Toby caused me much pain in this respect. In films which portray private detectives—or others—breaking into a house, reading files (usually in the dead of night), I become embarrassed lest the owner of the files turn up at that moment. It was that same embarrassment I would feel in the presence of Toby’s lying.

In a different way I was troubled by Toby’s utter indifference to suffering, to terrible and painful events which others experienced. Early on I had a conscience about starving children, people caught in famines, plagues and earthquakes. I was horrified when the R100 airship met with a disaster, people being burned to death

and others being killed as they fell to earth. None of these things meant anything to Toby.

Cheating at cricket or football was another thing. I don’t think Toby even thought it was cheating. Since we did our own umpiring, and had a code of fair play, most of us owned up when something went wrong. Not so Toby. He was quite calm about everything. He never cheated, never made mistakes, never did anything wrong.

In these later years, when one chews the cud of memory quite a bit, I try to analyse or discern the case of Toby, my closest companion. I cannot say that he was truly my friend, for he bewildered me by his ways, but at the same time I liked being with him. I suppose he was a kind of role-case for me. Unconsciously I was trying to learn how others lived. How he lived always amazed me.

I think, now, that I have partly solved the enigma of Toby Crawley. I think I understand him. I believe—indeed am sure—that he never came to terms with authority. Strangely enough he used the weapons of conscience and authority quite a bit. If we were in some kind of mischief and he was at the centre of it, then we were not doing anything wrong. If, however, he was not at the heart of the mischief, suddenly he became powerfully censorious. He would castigate us for the crime we were committing. Moments before he spoke we thought we were just having mischievous fun. When he felt left out he had the power to turn our reasonably innocent fun into a pretty dreadful sin or crime.

Not that he was much moved by what we did. It was simply a way of getting us into his power and of

spreading about a bit of misery. I can see now that he knew how to speak at the conscience. I have learned that one should never speak *at* a conscience, but—if necessary—to that conscience. *At* stirs guilt and brings remorse as unpalatable as dry ice, whilst *to* may move us to be genuinely sorry and escape to peace via repentance. I simply mention this to show that I have learned since that Toby was a manipulator of persons. He could manipulate his persons, and especially his plump old Grandpa, who doted on him, and who saw only sin in us, and only pristine innocence in the grandson—that apple of his eye!

I have learned how human beings manipulate one another through inducing feelings of guilt where there has been no guilty action. I have learned that all humans have existential guilt: they feel guilty for not being perfect. It was this guilt into which Toby tapped. I see it all now and marvel that in those days I was so dumb. I have learned that there is a human technique of guilt-transference, but we will not go into that. What concerns me is Toby's power to get us all under his authority. The curious thing was that he simply ignored authority in all its forms. Of course he could toe the line in situations which demanded an outward form of obedience, but I do not believe that he ever obeyed anyone in his life.

He carefully avoided anything which had even the touch of religion. He never entered a church, although he was happy to attend the church boys' club. You were nothing in our district unless you belonged to that! He never listened to anything our leaders said along the line of spiritual information or advice. He kept strictly away from Sunday School and church services. His family

was what you might call 'pagan', but then pagans have their own deities by which they exist.

Not so Toby. Outwardly he was respectful of all things. Inwardly—well, I do not know for sure. I simply know he never obeyed anyone, made no act of submission to anyone, and did just what he liked to do. I can see now that he understood the matter of conscience and that he knew how to handle it—even use it. He desired applause from his conscience—not rebuke or judgment—and for the most part, it seemed, he got it.

What happened to Toby Crawley? I really don't know. I reckon he married a fine young woman of his own social ilk, and had a good family wedding, and has—by this time—brought up his children, and if so they would probably be married by now. I imagine that he would still seem to his friends and family and neighbours to be a good sort of a stick. Perhaps he would puzzle some, but on the whole he would have got away with it, in life. This by contrast with many rebellious people whom I counsel. Many of these are into drugs, alcohol, deviant forms of sexual behaviour, gambling and the like. Without exception these are angry people. Like Toby they have never done anything wrong. They have reasons for being angry, for life—they say—has treated them badly. They have had difficult parents, awkward schoolteachers, pestering employers and interfering bureaucrats. They never really 'got their break'. Circumstances, heredity and environment seem almost always to have been against them. They are the victims of many things. That is why they are justifiably angry, resentful, suspicious and cynical.

I can easily understand these people. Like Toby they have never obeyed anyone. They are impervious to authority. They wriggle away from it; they toe the line and laugh at their own deceit; they often become violent against it; and they accept no blame for any of their actions. What, then, is the difference between Toby and them? I think that in many ways there is no difference: both ignore the supreme authority—God—and all familial and governmental authorities. Long ago they have rationalised all these as faulty, and unworthy of their obedience. At the same time they lack the security that comes from being under some authority, and this seems to compound their dislike of authority. I think that—unlike Toby—they cannot seem to train their consciences to let them off the hook at every turn, move and event of life. If you are a thoughtful person you will probably say that no person can so train his—or her—conscience in that way. I myself wonder at my conclusion regarding Toby. This must be the sin called ‘unpardonable’ and ‘beyond redemption’. One does not look for forgiveness when that one thinks he—or she—has done no wrong!

As the years have passed, I have realised that all of us have a bit of Toby in us. We, too, make provision for our consciences. That is why I cannot agree with William Temple. I am grateful for my conscience, but am wary of letting it either tyrannise me, or let me off the hook. I am grateful for—and to—my parents who were pre-remissive society citizens in this world. Their reasonable honesty kept me reasonably true to reasonable values. Better still, I caught some of their concern for humanity in its suffering and misery. I suppose I

learned from them the changes of sorrow and joy, suffering and well-being. As things have fallen out, I suppose I have suffered quite a bit, but I greatly enjoy my fellow human beings. I love life, and I like the gift of teaching and of writing. I have also learned that I can deceive myself and others—that some of the Toby-disease flows in my veins, but, when cut down to size, I first feel greatly hurt and then wonderfully liberated.

I don’t think I ever really envied Toby. In retrospect I think I actually pitied him—and this without patronage or condescension. I know he missed the keen edge of sorrow, but he also missed the keen edge of joy and phenomenal happiness when one discovers some new truth, when one comes suddenly upon a rich and lovely phase of life. So much there is to enjoy, and pain and suffering seem to give a piquant flavour to it all.

Of course Toby might have had a terrifying experience of self-revelation. Tragedy sometimes breaks up and fragments the protective walls we build around ourselves. Perhaps the death of a much-loved child, or his wife, might have caused a stark unmasking of his being. I do not know. I hope so, and if so, then I hope that he will have survived the event, and learned from the episode. The trouble with our Tobies is that they do not have great love for spouses or children, however much they may be proud of them. Yet does it not happen with Tobies as well as it does with others, that somehow—beneath all conditioning of conscience—something of genuine humanity—the image of God—is still present, eventually disturbing and unseating the self-trained conscience and causing reality to enter that life?

* * *

What I say now—in conclusion—you must believe is not said with any element of self-righteousness. Times happen when we testify to the greatness and goodness, holiness and love of God. This is not only good to do, but is also essential for our continued wellbeing as true humans. I love worship. I have a great sense of dread of God, but it is not a frightening dread. It is not a slavish fear. It is a good fear, cleansing out the detritus that accumulates in a person who is not perfect. I have a great respect and a genuine gratitude for authority. I am glad God has ordained the powers that be, and that every authority—no matter its quality—is delegated by God. I am glad for my parents—their memory is very strong and rich, though I know, like me, they were often faulty. I am grateful for my teachers, though some of them terrified me. I am glad of church leaders, leaders in civilian society. I think policemen are fine, though some of them fall into corruption. I am glad of our parliamentary leaders. I have great delight when I sit in a court of law and see the respect that is still given to these delegated magistrates and judges. I am aware that there are faulty advocates, and that judges have their prejudices and strange whims, yet I am glad for every form of authority. I am also aware of the whims and prejudices of those of us who vote our leaders into parliament, and who say we uphold authority. I believe I have worked my way through most of these things, but it has taken much time and labour to do so.

I love authority. I love the authority that demands and enables my worship. I love to think of God, and His greatness. I have been caught up into God for many years, and now I know Him—at least in part. I am not tolerant of frivolity in worship, I dislike irreverence and

I know I am mostly conservative in my choice of liturgy and forms of worship. I think I understand that, in their spirits, others wish to express their joy in ways that are not native to me, so I accept these differentiations, and in some cases admire them.

Without snobbery, I am grateful for not being as Toby. I recognise that he is, with me, equally human, but I have pity—and even fear—for the liberal ones who scorn authority, who train their consciences to withhold rebuke and judgment. I know I am no less—or more—a sinner than the Toby I knew, but I think that, though I am not better than he, I am better off! Liberty does not appeal to me if it is only liberty from God and law and true morality. Equality has always seemed to me to be an unnecessary attempt to measure and homogenise. I like the differentiations within the Godhead, within Man, and in all creation. I reject the ideas of equality and inequality as irrelevant and unreal. As for fraternity—I like the idea of the theologian (P. T. Forsyth) who pointed out that fraternity presupposes fatherhood, and true brotherhood comes only through the true Fatherhood. I do not think that the French Revolution achieved any of these goals, but rather disturbed us and diverted us from the true goal of integrity: ultimate peace, unity, serenity and a glorious destiny.

Thank you, Toby, for having stimulated me to write thus. My conscience tells me that there is much in this essay which is faulty and imperfect, but Divine grace marvellously assures me that the Father rather applauds it and sends me intimations of His love!

CHAPTER TEN

The Matter of Hierarchy: Functional & Relational

INTRODUCTION: THE NEED TO UNDERSTAND HIERARCHY

The meanings of words may be found in a dictionary, but, as someone has said, 'A dictionary is a series of guesses'. Words are vitalistic, and change their meanings according to usage. There is generally a subjective impression given by words, and, according to the mood or temper of the writer or reader, images are formed from words. Early in this book we noted that the fallenness of Man brings a dislike of the words 'law', 'commands', 'authority', 'subjection' and 'obedience'. The word 'hierarchy' appears to be one which is in disfavour, especially to the egalitarian mind. There seems to be no way of obliterating the connotations of these words, unless some radical change in understanding takes place. I believe that relationships are what matter in life, and because of this, when relationships do not succeed—as, say, in families—then certain attitudes towards authority figures persist throughout life.

Only some unusual happening can change the tenor of them.¹ *Revelation*, and not merely *explanation*, is needed to bring about this transformation of true understanding. When it comes, then theological, familial, governmental and ecclesial hierarchies² take

¹ For example, children have certain images of parents and other authority figures. The word 'father' to many children carries the connotation of authority, law, demand, judgment and similar 'heavy' impressions. Is this necessarily the fault of the father, or is it the result of the imperfection of fallen humanity, that is, the fallenness of the parent and of the child? Certainly the childhood impressions fix an image which can be heavily authoritarian and so block off a wonderful view of God as the true—archetypal—loving Father. See my *I Love the Father* (NCPI, 1990) and *Oh, Father! Our Father!* (NCPI, 1985), where the matter of the formation of such images is expanded.

² By 'ecclesial hierarchies' we do not mean necessarily those which have developed in the history of the church, as given in the note following. We are talking simply about the ecclesial authority in the apostolic church. The following note is taken from *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, reprinted 1977, vol. 5, p. 275):

HIERARCHY (from Gk. *hieros*, 'sacred,' and *archia*, 'rule'): The rule of sacred things; then a body of rulers organized for such rule. The Roman Church probably presents the most perfect example of a hierarchy organised monarchically, the whole power centering in the pope, and most minutely graded, both with respect to orders—bishops, priests, deacons (the *ordines juris divini*), and subdeacons, acolytes, exorcists, lectors, doorkeepers, etc. (the *ordines juris ecclesiastici*), and with respect to jurisdiction—archbishops, metropolitans, exarchs, patriarchs, deans, vicars, cardinals, legates, etc. In the Greek Church the hierarchical organization is oligarchical: above the several patriarchs there is no pope. In the Evangelical Churches, where the State rules the Church, more or less of the hierarchical apparatus may be retained, as in the Church of England and the Prussian Church; while, when the Church is established on the principle of universal priesthood, and the congregation rules itself, as in the American churches and many free churches in Europe, all hierarchy disappears.

The persistence of a desire to rule, or to use priesthood as a form of domination, is seen in Hooker's statement regarding the abolition of the term 'priest' for the biblical term 'presbyter'. He said, 'New presbyter is old priest writ large'! Pastors can be little popes, whilst the often-maligned Pope can be a gracious pastor.

on a new look, even, it could be said, a lovable appearance.³

THE TRINITY: THE SOURCE, THE PARADIGM AND THE POWER, FOR ALL HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

We have seen that the relationships between the Three Persons and their Unity as One God would be unknowable for us were it not for the revelation God has given us, and especially in and by His Son and through His Spirit. It is an extraordinary thing that human beings are permitted, let alone are moved personally by God, to view these relationships. It is even more extraordinary that through the gift of adoption—following the liberating action of the atonement—human beings are reconciled fully by God to Himself, made one with Him since their lives are hidden with Christ in Him: thus the powerful truth of the Triune God dwelling in the persons of His people, and they dwelling in the Triune Godhead. Via the *imago Dei*, resultant relationships must emerge, for regeneration brings persons back to their creational state in God, and what they experience are the only true relationships human beings can know, since they derive

³ I refer to the fact that true authority is a delegated gift. Authority is to be used lovingly, for purposes of serving those in its jurisdiction. Christ as Lord is not dominating or domineering, but he is the Servant—*par excellence*—to his people. We are not speaking of mere benevolence which can arise out of a natural disposition, but of the dedicated serving which arises out of love and its sense of total responsibility to those under its ministry.

from, and comport with, the law of Christ—the true law of God. Of course the reality of Divine love (*agape*) is the great power by which true relationships obtain (I John 4:11, 12, 19).

What we must keep in mind is that these relationships do not come as prescriptions. They are not legal requirements or even specified roles, although they often appear to be. They issue from the archetype of the Godhead. They are also linked with the principle of hierarchy. Speaking of the *imago Dei*, Thielicke says:

It is characteristic that the various references to the divine likeness in Genesis (1:26; 5:1; 9:6; cf. also Wis. 2:23; Sir. 17:3) do not give us statements of ontological content but restrict themselves to these hierarchical relations, to the position of man in the total cosmos. This is true even of a verse like Genesis 5:1, where the concept of the divine likeness is, as it were, a preamble to the first genealogy in the Bible, the one that ends with Noah (5:32).⁴

THE MATTER OF ALL HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

There can be no question that human relationships commence with creation, with Man made in the image of God, and with the man and the woman. Whilst there is some disclosure of the Godhead, all is not disclosed. Likewise, whilst we can understand the *imago Dei*, there must be much of it which is not disclosed. Only what is disclosed of the Trinity can help us understand Man. We have argued that, as the likeness and

⁴ Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics: Volume 1: Foundations*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979, p. 155.

reflection of God, Man—that is, the human race—has not only the paradigm for relationships in the Godhead, but the relationships of the Persons are the only way in which true human relationships can obtain. It is essential, then, to know whether relationships within the Godhead are hierarchical. We cannot deny the hierarchies in which we presently live, but we ask whether they are of the Divine order, and not an order which comes from human fallenness.

THE MATTER OF HIERARCHY

Biblically, Man is hierarchical in relation to the creation; that is, he is above it, and rules over it—that is, he has hierarchical placement and responsibility to rule over all other creatures—yet he is under God, who not only calls him to lordship over it, but also exercises Lordship over him. He prohibits him from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The mandate of Genesis 1:28 is presumably not beyond Man's capacity, nor is it in any way inhibitive for Man *qua* Man, any more than the prohibition to eat of the tree is essentially inhibitive. The question arises whether in the Triune Godhead and the relation of the Persons there is an hierarchy. For example, is the Father as *fons divinitatis* in hierarchical relationship to the Son, since the Son proceeds from Him? Likewise, is the Spirit in an hierarchical order?

These questions are asked because they have great bearing on our whole thesis regarding authority. If there is an hierarchical order within the Godhead, then there can be no questioning of it in the human order, that is, in the functioning of the *imago Dei*. It is without

question that, as a result of the Fall, part of God's judgment on the fallen couple was to declare the hierarchical rule of the man over the woman: 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you'. Whilst accepting this self-evident fact that following the Fall there is an hierarchical order in marriage, some scholars speak of it being the *result* of the Fall but deny it is a true ontological—that is, creational—order. As we have noted before, the same argument is sometimes used of the whole principle of law and authority; that is, that had there been no fall there would not have been law and authority, since it is only Man's sinfulness which calls for them.

There are two ways to go about researching whether hierarchy is part of the order of creation, the first being to examine the biblical accounts of creation, and the second to find some situation in which there is an unquestionable hierarchical order and examine it.

The Creation of Man

The materials of Genesis 1:26–31 show that Man's creation is purely in the context of vocation. The *imago Dei* must not be viewed in any way which separates Man from the responsibility and task of ruling 'over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth'. God as Creator rules over all things, but Man is delegated this position. 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.' Genesis 5:1f. adds, 'When God created man, he made

him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created *them*, and he blessed *them* and named *them* Man'. There can be no question that the man and the woman together are Man; that is, in union they constitute Man. *Man is a unitive male-female entity, dynamical in relationship with God, serving Him in the mandate and one with Him in His purposes.* It is as one that they undertake the fulfilling of the Divine mandate. If—following Thielicke—we see the *imago Dei* as relational and teleological in the fulfilling of the mandate, then we can see that the relationship between the man and the woman is one which subsists within the action, rather than in some prescribed relational category, as such. Questions of the man looking at the woman, and the woman at the man, that is, living *vis-à-vis* instead of being one entity facing the creation as God's dynamic image, should not be raised. The account of the man—as Man—naming the creatures confirms his place in the hierarchy, but the woman is missing.⁵ She comes as a helpmeet, and she is a special creation of God, but not as the Man was created is she created from him. Thus she is 'bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh'. She is integrally part of him. Now they are together Man and cannot be thought of as apart in being Human, that is, Man, but we must see them as functionally, teleologically, vocationally active. Does this, then, constitute any form of hierarchy? If by hierarchy we mean a course of members graduated in descending order of subordination from one who is

⁵ We have pointed out before that some would say woman was inherent in the Man and so the Man was androgynous. The woman was made out of the Man, and he was prior to her. She has a special creation given to her, even though she was 'bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh'.

superordinate, and if we understand elements of superiority and inferiority according to the places of the members, then the answer must be, 'No!'. If, however, we mean 'A course of members functionally moving together for the fulfilment of a task, in which the hierarchical order is required', then the answer is, 'Yes!'.

We constantly face the psychological and emotional difficulties that come from being under another person, in having to take directions from that one. The deeper issue of how we relate to God in His authority and 'superordination', and so consequently relate to others who have authority over us, is really the basic matter. Any enquiry into the matters of law, authority and hierarchy should take this into consideration.

Ontological Hierarchy

When we talk about ontological hierarchy, we must keep in mind that the division of the Trinity into two categories—ontological and economic—is not wholly satisfactory. God is not subsistent without being *actuosus*, that is, being in action. We must keep in mind the corresponding actional nature of the *imago Dei*. We now take one or two hierarchies that came into being at creation. In Genesis 1:14–18 we see the hierarchy of sun and moon, and Man's rule over creation. As Man was to rule over all living creatures, so each of these was to rule—the sun by day and the moon by night. What was the place and effect of these hierarchies? The answer is: they had a task to perform—a vocational task of goodness—to give light, and to mark out days and nights. There is also the sense that they were to keep creation within the prescribed boundaries of their rule.

If the creation of man and woman in hierarchical order were such, then the order would have been purely with a view to ruling creation for its own good, and, presumably, for God's glory (cf. Ps. 8:3ff.; 19:1ff.). It is difficult to escape this principle as we read the text. Linked with this is the whole matter of the creation being subjected to futility through the fall of Man and—in particular—the curse upon the earth. The rehabilitation of the sons of God into 'the liberty of the glory' will also rehabilitate the creation: hence Man's hierarchical authority must have been meant only for good (Gen. 1:31).

If there is a Divine hierarchy, and there is a human hierarchy, then each can be considered, but—as we have previously seen—we do have a hierarchy that involves both God and man in I Corinthians 11:3, and this should be helpful in establishing the principle of hierarchy: 'But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God'. The order is interesting. It starts with Christ and ends with God. It is not stated as a descending order, even though it can be seen that way. Why is it set out in this way? Because Paul is talking of the order of a man and his wife. The man does not stand alone as superordinate to the wife. He stands under Christ, and this alters matters considerably. If he were standing alone in his headship then the wife would be immediately and only subject to him, and his approach would be conditioned by his autonomous headship. As Christ is his head, his effective headship is of his Lord. Likewise, Christ is not standing outside the Father in exercising his Lordship of the man. The wife is not outside her husband, since Man is man and woman—a

unitive entity—face to face. Both are standing together in the *imago Dei* and as the *imago Dei*—as active in vocation fulfilling the will of God—being, as one, purposive.

There is more to it than even that. There is the *perichoresis*—*circumincessio*⁶ that obtains throughout the hierarchy. Christ is *in* God, the husband *in* Christ, the woman *in* the husband—the relational hierarchy. God is *in* Christ, Christ is *in* the man, the man is *in* the woman—still the relational hierarchy. All are mutually inter-dwelling one another and all others. This is the relational unity which is Trinitarian and which is extended to Man—given in the gift of the *imago Dei*. All questions of domination, superiority—inferiority dissolve.

⁶ Historical theology shows us that the term *circumincessio* was used by St Bonaventure to translate the *perichoresis* of John of Damascus. The Council of Florence had chosen to use the term *circuminsession*, and, later than John of Damascus, Thomas Aquinas preferred *circumincessio*. The differences in meaning of the words need not occupy us here. See *The Christian Trinity in History* by B. de Margeria (St Bede's Petersham, Massachusetts, 1982, pp. 178–186), and Jurgen Moltmann's *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (SCM, London, 1981, pp. 174–176). The doctrine of *perichoresis* or *circumincessio* is vital for our understanding of the Trinity, and so for human relationships. The two terms generally cover the idea of the co-inherence of the Three Persons, that is, 'the Persons do not only subsist in the common divine substance; they also exist in their relations to the other Persons' (Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, p. 174). The *perichoresis* of John of Damascus spoke not only of the interpenetration of the members of the Godhead, but of a circulatory giving–receiving movement. As Persons they are discrete (provided, of course, that the use of 'discrete' here does not suggest three centres of consciousness—tritheism—instead of one centre—personal monotheism), and have their own personal characteristics, but as the Triune God they are One, yet in the circulation of the Divine life they give to one another so that their unity is out of the differentiations and not in spite of them. It means that whilst they retain their own discreteness they cannot be other than One together, and so the Spirit must be as much in the Father and the Son as each of them in him—the Spirit.

All are one: all share the liberty of the Godhead—subsistent in the Three Persons; extended in creation; damaged in the Fall; and rehabilitated in redemption.

We must face the fact that we cannot get back to the primal union with its innocence and bliss of the first couple. Even with redemption and the presence of the Godhead, we cannot fully know what utter unity is—that is, the unity of the man and the woman in full relationship—but we certainly have a sense of it. Its perfect experience does not take place in this pen-ultimate age. Such unity is fiercely contested by the world, the flesh and the devil. Fallen Man has opted for humanistic egalitarianism, trusting that this is the way to, and of, true unity.

I believe egalitarianism is not only an insistence upon human autonomy, but it is also a cry for unity—for interrelational oneness—and rightly so. In I Corinthians 11:3–12, Paul insists that the husband is the image and glory of God and the wife is the glory of her husband⁷ and that the man was not created for the woman but the woman for the man, yet ‘nevertheless, in the Lord, woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman’. That is, their hierarchical relationship does not prevent unity, but rather endorses it. In Matthew 23:8, Jesus tells his listeners, ‘But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are

⁷ If the wife is the glory of the husband and he is the glory and image of God, then she stands in relationship to him, as he does to God. Just as God’s glory is not seen apart from the man, so the man’s glory is not seen apart from the woman. Without her he is without glory: with her both together are the glory and image of God. It is not envisaged that the man apart from the woman is the glory and image of God.

all brethren’, that is, it is not for a teacher to *demand* he be called ‘rabbi’, for the disciples relate primarily to God as their Teacher, and so together, that is, as one—that is, in unity. In II Corinthians 1:24, Paul says, ‘Not that we lord it over your faith; we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith’; that is, ‘We do not press you about in regard to your faith: you are handling that quite well, yourselves. No one must lord it over anyone’.

So important is the matter of hierarchy, especially in the face of the present feminist–masculist debate, that we need to pursue it fully. If indeed there is a hierarchy within the Triune Godhead, then it will figure significantly for the whole matter of human relationships. For this reason I have written an Appendix, ‘Superordination and Subordination’, which is quite long and contains material that is pertinent to the line we are pursuing; namely, whether law, authority and hierarchy are ontological or not, and, if so, then what changes have come about in relationships because of the Fall and the consequent curse, and how do we go about them? The short précis of the Appendix which I set out below is asserted but not defended here, but see the actual Appendix where I have attempted its justification. Following the material of the précis, we will resume our discussion of human relationships, commencing with the primal couple.

Summary of Appendix: Superordination and Subordination

Commencing with the observation that no one comes to discussion without some bias, and that that bias can only be checked by

living in the dynamics of justification, it was also suggested that because of the Fall, Man cannot be impartial to the idea of authority and law. We must see, then, whether within the Godhead—that is, amongst the Persons—there is a superordination–subordination. If this were so, the matter of human superordination–subordination hierarchies would be reasonably established.

Because of the inter-dwelling of the three Persons, the usual view of hierarchy—were hierarchy to exist in the Godhead—would have to change. The truth is that there has ever been the interdwelling and the *perichoresis–circumincessio* of the persons of the Godhead. Thus mutuality spells authentic sociality (ontological), and since all is in the context of economic–revelation activity, that which is ontological is not static but dynamic, that is, in interpersonal relationships.

The texts in John's Gospel of 14:28, 1:1 (esp. *pros ton theon*⁸), 5:18 and 10:29–33 needed to be dealt with in order to comprehend the Son's statements regarding the Father—'The Father is greater than I', 'I and the Father are one'. This led on to discussion of the ascended Christ's position in the cosmos, and in this aeon. This was actuated by the idea of some theologians (cf. the *Quicunque vult*) that the Son was equal to God as touching his deity, but inferior as touching his humanity. In order to preserve the equality of the Son, the work of incarnation and redemption (*opere ad extra*) was put on an inferior level to the ontological subsistence of Triune Godhead (*opere in extra*). It was then argued that there is an order of superordination and subordination within the Triune Godhead, but it must be understood in the light of relationship; the counsel of God as seen in salvation history and the co-operating of all Persons in this work—the economic–revelation work relating to the *telos* of God.

The whole matter of Christ's incarnation as humiliation was discussed and the idea negated in favour of its being a Servant work, and therefore not humiliating, but indeed the highest work of

all, if we can rightly speak of 'levels' in the Trinitarian action. Exegetically, Christ's 'humbling' of himself—not to be mistaken for humiliation—was not in relation to incarnation but to crucifixion, so that work amongst mankind cannot be denoted as inferior to what might be called 'celestial' work.

The whole matter of superordination–ordination was then discussed and the ontological joy both of authority and submission, command and obedience, was examined. It was claimed that understanding subordination–serving must be as much a revelation as any other truth of God. Contemporary views of the matter were discussed, especially because the claim was made that subordination–serving is the highest form of personal being, including Moltmann's view—linked with contemporary process-theology of God's patri-compassionism; that is, not the heretical patripassianism, but total identification with Man and his suffering, serving Man in some way through this shared suffering.

The Outworking of Hierarchy in Submission and Obedience

A current thinking is that headship is related only to source or origin; for example, the source of the Son is the Father, the source of woman is man (see Gen. 2:18–24), so that headship is benign and in no way involves ruling or the giving of commands. This claim that headship (whether of the Father, the Son, or the husband) does not involve ruling or commands can-not be substantiated. This can be seen from the following:

The Father's Superordination in Regard to the Son

- (a) The Father commanded the Son to come into the world. Over forty times in John's Gospel Jesus uses the verb for being sent—by the Father.

⁸ That is, 'face to face'. The Son is face to face with the Father, so that he can be no less in Deity than the Father, but primarily this text tells us he was one with the Father relationally as also he was functionally—in the work of creation.

- (b) Jesus spoke of the Father giving him commands (John 10:18; 12:49; 14:31), and said, 'I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love'. In John 12:50 he said, 'I know that his commandment is eternal life'.
- (c) The Father took the initiative in the Incarnation and the Atonement (Rom. 3:24–25; II Cor. 5:21; I John 4:9–10, 14). The Son was commanded to do these things.

Christ's Willing Subordination in Regard to the Father

- (a) Christ was under the Father's authority (see above, and also John 5:19–20; 8:28; 14:10).
- (b) The Father gave the Son authority (Matt. 11:27; 28:18; John 3:35; 5:22ff.; 10:27–30; see also Matt. 3:17; Ps. 2:6–7; Isa. 42:1; Rev. 2:27; 3:21f.).
- (c) The Son learned obedience (Heb. 5:8–10; cf. 2:10) and was obedient (John 9:4; 10:17; 14:30–31; Phil. 2:8).
- (d) He rejoiced in the Father's will (Matt. 11:25–26; Heb. 10:7; Ps. 40:8; John 4:34).
- (e) He said many times that he had kept the Father's will. See John 15:10: 'I have kept my Father's commandments'.

Note: Jesus could say, 'The Father is greater than I' (John 14:28), and, 'I and the Father are one' (John 10:30).

Christ Gave Commands to His Followers

- (a) Matthew 7:24: 'Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them . . . '.
- (b) Luke 6:46: 'Why do you call me "Lord, Lord," and not do what I tell you?'.
- (c) John 13:34 (cf. 15:12): 'A new commandment I give to you'.
- (d) John 14:15: 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments'. John 14:21: 'He who has my commandments and keeps them . . . '.
- (e) John 15:10: 'If you keep my commandments' (cf. John 8:51: 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death').
- (f) Matthew 28:20: ' . . . all that I have commanded you'.
- (g) Acts 1:2: 'after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles' (cf. Acts 10:42: 'he commanded us to preach to the people').
- (h) See Christ's commands to Paul (Acts 9, 22, 26).
- (i) Notice that the Gospel is a command. To believe it is to obey this command and come to 'the obedience of faith' (see Acts 6:7; 17:30; Rom. 10:16ff.; I Thess. 1:9; II Thess. 1:7–8; cf. Rom. 1:5; 15:18; 16:26).

We can sum up these statements by concluding that the headship of the Father is one in which, and by

which, He gives commands to His Son, and His Son likewise in his headship gives commands to his followers. What, then, is unacceptable in the giving of commands? Was not the essence of the Law (*Torah*) instruction, and not legislation? Is the Law not ‘the Way’ rather than ‘the Legislation’? Would not we be without direction if there were no Law? Is not the Law ‘the outshining of God’s nature’? Is it not holy, and spiritual and good (Rom. 7:12)?

The question arises: ‘Do his followers in any way give commands to others within the church? Do elders, for example, give commands, and in any sense at all do husbands—heads of their wives—ever give commands? If such are given, are they only “domineering over those in your charge”, or are they protective directions by those appointed “overseers of the flock”?’ The answer to the former question must be, ‘No!’, and the latter question, ‘Yes!’, but we need to check this reply.⁹

⁹ When referring to ‘leaders’ in the church, that is, ‘overseers’ (*episkopoi*) and ‘rulers’ (*hegoumenoi*) and ‘those over you’ (*prois-tamenous*), these terms would appear to be interchangeable for the words ‘elders’ (*presbuteroi*) or ‘bishops’ (*episkopoi*), and, perhaps, ‘pastors’ (*poimenas*), that is, ‘shepherds’ (see Acts 14:23; 15:6; 20:17, 28; Eph. 4:11; I Thess. 5:12; I Tim. 3:1ff.; 5:17f.; Titus 1:5ff.; Heb. 13:7, 17; I Pet. 5:1ff.; cf. Rev. 4:4 and the many other references in Revelation). There is also a sense in which younger men are under older men (I Tim. 5:1, and perhaps I Pet. 5:5), as also younger women are under older women (Titus 2:3f.). When we remember that Christ under the headship of his Father not only drew his origin from Him but obeyed His commands, and that Christ, the head of the husband, constituted not only the man’s source and origin but that he also gives him commands, and as head of the Church gives it commands, then there can be no doubt that the elders represent Christ’s government of the Church; that is, they are his headship in practical fact and action, and therefore have a most responsible leadership and rulership role, as well as the role of shepherding the flock, and feeding it. This seems to tie in with the fact that Christ chose men to be apostles, and lead the Church. In this sense Peter calls himself an elder (I Pet. 5:5). One of the tasks of the elders and/or the bishops is to teach. I Timothy 3:2, ‘an apt teacher’; I Timothy 5:17, ‘who labour in preaching and teaching’; Titus 1:9, ‘he must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it’; Hebrews 13:7 (assuming the leaders are elders), ‘who spoke to you the word of God’; whilst I Peter 5:2, ‘shepherd [*poimante*] the flock of God’ must mean ‘feed them’, that is, with the bread of life. If ‘pastors and teachers’ (Eph. 4:11) are the one, as many exegetes think, and they are the elders (as this present writer feels forced to conclude), then Paul’s talk to the elders at Ephesus (Acts 20:17ff.)

Submission, Subjection and Submissiveness

One way of doing this is to examine the verb *hupotasso*—which, in its various forms (active, middle, passive, aorist, etc.), means ‘to place, put, or arrange under’, ‘to subordinate’, ‘to bring under influence’, ‘to be subordinated’, ‘to submit oneself’, ‘to render obedience’, ‘to be submissive’—with the nouns ‘subordi-nation’ and ‘submissiveness’ (*hupotage*). This will help us to see (i) ontological categories of authority which should be obeyed, and (ii) categories given by God in a sinful world, and which, though temporary, are nevertheless binding and conducive to good order, harmony and conduct. The *verb* is used of:

appears to make pastoring the flock (amongst other things) a matter of teaching. If, then, we take ourselves back to I Timothy 2:8–12 where a woman is not permitted to teach, it would appear that teaching is primarily a directing by the ‘head’ of the ‘body’, since teaching is not merely the right impartation of information but the dynamic revelation of ‘the whole counsel’ of God and has as much to do with life and its practice as with faith, since exhortation is part of the teaching ministry. It requires the ‘head’ to impart to the ‘body’ that which it needs. This is not to say that within the body (member to member) there is not any teaching, for there is, but it is not the kind that the elders—overseers—leaders—shepherds—rulers give, particularly in the context of worship.

Jesus submitting himself to his parents (Luke 2:51);
 The demons being subjected to the apostles (Luke 10:17–20);
 Principalities, powers and ‘all things’ to Christ (Eph. 1:21–22; I Pet. 3:22; I Cor. 15:24–27 [cf. Ps. 8:5; 110:1]; Heb. 2:5–8 [cf. Heb. 1:3; 10:13]);
 Christians to authorities (Rom. 13:1–7; I Pet. 2:13f.; Titus 3:1);
 Wives to husbands (Col. 3:18; Eph. 5:22–24; I Pet. 3:1; Titus 2:5);
 Children of God to ‘the Father of spirits’ (Heb. 12:9);
 Members of the body to each other (Eph. 5:21);
 The younger men to the elders (I Pet. 5:5);
 Members to ‘good men’, fellow workers and labourers (I Cor. 16:16);
 The church to Christ (Eph. 5:24);
 Spirits of the prophets to prophets (I Cor. 14:32);
 Servants to masters (I Pet. 2:18);
 Slaves to masters (Titus 2:9);
 The creation to vanity (Rom. 8:20);
 Sin (negatively) to the law (Rom. 8:7).

The *noun* is used of:

Women as subordinate (I Tim. 2:11);
 Children as submissive (I Tim. 3:4);
 ‘... obedience in acknowledging the gospel of Christ’ (II Cor. 9:13);
 Non-yielding where the gospel is in peril (Gal. 2:5).

Also related to subjection and submission is obedience. In Titus 2:9 slaves are to be subject to their masters. In Colossians 3:22 they are to obey (*hupakouo*) their masters. In this case, if we bring these two references together, then subjection calls for obedience. In Hebrews 13:17 (cf. 13:7) obedience (*peitharcheo*) and submission (*hupeiko*, ‘to yield, give way, be submissive’) are linked. In this case the church is to obey its rulers (elders?), and be submitted to them. Children are to

obey (*hupakouo*) their parents (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20; cf. Luke 2:51), and in the first case submission is enjoined (Eph. 5:21), whilst in the second case the children cannot be unsubmitted if the wife is called to be (Col. 3:18). In I Peter 3:5–6 the apostle describes ‘holy women who hoped in God’ as being submissive (*hupotasso*) to their husbands, and says ‘Sarah obeyed [*hupakouo*] Abraham, calling him lord’. Submission and obedience are here joined.

These references concerning subjection, submission and obedience are set forth as objectively as possible, to show that there is a divinely appointed order, and a demanded obedience. We will discuss the principles of subjection and obedience below, for they may well be different from what they seem as most of us view them. Certainly they must never be interpreted in a legalistic sense.

The Total Environment of Hierarchy, Commands, Submission and Obedience

Often, in seeking what is ontological so that we may press ourselves to conformity with it, we forget two sets of factors. *The first set is to do with communion*; that is, the communion within the Triune Godhead which is the relational situation of true being, as well as the true source for true human being and living. If we forget this, then our research into the ontological can be—and generally is—harsh, cold, unrelational and even legalistic. It is often metaphysical to the loss of personal, existential and relational categories of experience. We are trying to discover and apply a ‘norm’ of relationships without necessarily understanding and living

in the communion which is trinitarian, and which is shared by the Godhead with elect Man. When this understanding and experience of the Divine communion with Man comes to him, it issues from the overwhelming love of God for him; love which is poured into the heart, and love which becomes the living environment for his life and fellowship. Partaking in the Divine nature not only dissolves the ancient enmity against God, authority and law, but it builds a rich new love for it. When we keep in mind the fact that such love does not only come to him personally and singly—‘the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’—but that it comes corporately, that is, in the body of Christ, in the full fellowship of the brethren, then we know that the corporate personal environment is that of love—a theme which Paul, John and Peter pursue with vigour.

The second set of factors is the varied environment in which we live. All men—whether they wish it or not—‘live and move and have [their] being’ in God, but they dislike this Presence and the knowledge of God (Rom. 1:28) so they suppress it (Rom. 1:18). They are antagonists of God (Rom. 1:30) and side with evil powers that likewise are at enmity with God (cf. Eph. 2:1–3). It is in the context of this world with its ‘flesh’ and ‘devil’ that all have to live (cf. I Cor. 7:31; I John 2:14–15). Thus Paul says we are those ‘upon whom the end of the ages [aeons] has come’ (I Cor. 10:11). If we add to this the presence of the curse on the earth, and existential flux of human existence, then we can see the difficulty of discovering, applying and maintaining what we might call ‘ontological norms’. That is why we have to recognise that there is a ‘battle for relationships’. The

first set of factors assists in overcoming the second set of factors, but there are always ‘provisional’ as against ‘ontological’ solutions in this penultimate age. These must not be seen as lessening the nature of God’s will, but they have to do with law. In regard to God’s will there can never be a change, but with regard to the principle of given law there can be. Thielicke sees what he calls the refraction of God’s law; that is, that in the light of Man’s sinfulness and elements of amelioration, he says:

The doctrine of the Law must always be viewed against the background of the fall. The dark foil of this fallen aeon, which flees from God and blatantly defies him but is nonetheless called back by him, must be considered at every point when we speak of the Law of God. Whatever we say theologically concerning the nature of the Law must take its bearings from the Pauline statement that the Law was ‘added because of transgressions’ (Gal. 3:19).

From this it follows that one cannot understand the Law simply as ‘the’ will of God. The Law is rather God’s will as it pertains to us [*quoad nos*]. It is his will as it appears in the refracted light of our particular situation. Perhaps one might even say that it is the will of God as altered by the fallen world.¹⁰

Thielicke goes on to describe the amelioration of the law for certain conditions, but our purpose in taking his point is to show that any legalism in regard to what is ontological needs the tempering of grace—not in order to change the law, but to have a right approach to it so that we do not see it as a piece of inflexible and timeless legislation, but the law as it comes from the nature of God, within whom there has ever been both Law and

¹⁰ Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, p. 147.

Gospel at the one time. Linked with this, and something to be kept in mind, is the proneness we have to self-justification, so that we always have to fight the tendency to go back on grace. The pride of the religious ego directs us to self-effort, and all forms of evil have a hand in encouraging this. In this climate relationships are prejudiced, since self-justification puts us at odds with all persons.

Another strong element in the environment of hierarchy, for submission or otherwise, is that of the word which we hear. We can say that we are always hearing one word or another—of God or Man, of self or others—and the word we hear determines the strength or fragility of our relationships. The primal woman heard God's voice in regard to eating of the tree, but she unheard the word He had spoken when she listened to the word of the serpent. The man listened to the voice of his wife—unhearing God. The proverb in Israel, 'Where there is no prophecy the people cast off restraint', is also translatable as, 'Where there is no vision the people perish'; that is, prophecy (vision) is the word of God through the prophet, and when it comes to hearers they act upon it. If they have no word, they do not know how to act. We can rightly talk about the canonical word, but the measure of the canonical is not that it is received by the canonists, but that it is already the word of God which is recognised as innately canonical.

Every day we must hear the word, whether it be the inscripturated word (the Bible) or whether it comes to us through other means. We may study the Bible without it speaking to us, and the fault lies not in it but in us. We do not know where to go and what to do, what to

say and how to act, apart from the word. This is not to say that God denies us the word, but that it is in His presence that we hear it. Thus the communion of which we speak above is the environment of the word, and the two are inseparable. Where the word is heard, relationships have their true environment. In the company of the Persons, we know the love of God, and we hear the will of God in order to do it.

So, then, in the context of the communion with God, with our fellow creatures, in the living of life *vis-à-vis* the fallen world, the curse and the dynamical outcome of human guilt, we can know true relationships, and more so when we keep hearing the word of God to us. There is a responsibility on our part to remain in, and use, this environment.

THE ALTERNATIVES TO NON-HIERARCHICAL RELATIONALITY, SOCIALITY AND DIFFERENTIATION

It is the heart of this thesis of authority that what is ontological and economic for the Godhead is the same for Man, though for Man on his own level of humanhood; that is, that in the *imago Dei* he reflects the being and acts of the Godhead. If our reasoning is that the Fall demanded law and authority—*vis-à-vis* the sinfulness of Man—then we have to come to terms that that is the way things will have to be. That is, we must still live in the curse on the earth, the woman must have pain in childbirth and have her husband rule over her, and the soil must bring problems to man as he tills it. In the wider issue we must live with law and authority. The

most sensible thing to do—on this score—would be to approach the whole matter with joy and acceptance, and utilise it properly. The cherubim and the flaming turning sword seem to say, ‘Make the most of what you have out there. You cannot get into what is here’. History abounds in invented alternatives to God’s schema for fallen Man and creation. When it comes to relationships, those who think law and authority a necessary and unavoidable expedient will have to be realistic and adapt at every point.

If, however, law and authority are not expedients devised to meet the contingency of the Fall, and of fallen celestial powers pitting themselves against God; that is, if law and authority come down from the Godhead and are a gift to man—both creationally (ontolog-ically) and soteriologically—then we must face the whole matter of law, authority and relationships on an entirely different basis. Thielicke rightly warns against seeing the law as a static, timeless entity. He says:

It would be quite erroneous to try to understand this Law in terms of the ‘abstract truth’ it contains or to ascribe to it the kind of ‘timeless validity’ expressed, for example, in the categorical imperative. The moment we do this the Decalogue becomes ‘natural’ law and the axis of a corresponding system of ‘natural’ law. It becomes a moral idea which moves in the void and is no longer rooted in history. The existence of a system of natural law always indicates a crisis in the concept of history. Behind the historical phenomenon, behind the positive law which changes, there is sought a constant factor, a timeless Platonic idea of law, an abstract norm of the moral. To be sure, this negative judgement is not the only criticism which theology has to make of natural law; if that were the case it would imply a thoroughgoing committal of theology to positivism. Nevertheless, behind every attempt to interpret the Law of God

simply as natural law there is this attack on history. History becomes mere illustration or mythical adornment of that which is timelessly valid.¹¹

Thielicke says that the Law must always be viewed against the background of the Fall: ‘The dark foil of this fallen aeon, which flees from God and blatantly defies him but is nonetheless called back by Him, must be considered at every point when we speak of the Law of God’. We must take into consideration, he says, the fact that ‘the law was added because of transgressions’ (Gal. 3:19), and it would seem from this that Thielicke is saying the Law only came because of sins, so that his view is the first one nominated above. That is not true of Thielicke. He sees the Law as the will of God, but then not as simply that will. ‘The Law is rather God’s will as it pertains to us [*quoad nos*].’¹²

Law, in any treatment, must be seen as beneficial. It is a strange thing that the punishment—curse, as meted out to the woman and the man in Genesis 3, has been looked upon as a burden and a problem. Rarely does it seem to be viewed as an immense blessing. Law and authority are inseparably linked. Few would deny the authority of God and the delegated authority to the sun and the moon and man. The view of authority and law which fallen Man takes, makes them unacceptable as ontological, but rightly they are the means of blessing for the human being of faith. Because we as sinful beings have sinful views of law and authority, does not mean that both these things are deficient. The view in Israel of God’s authority and His Law come as a

¹¹ Thielicke, pp. 149–150.

¹² Thielicke, p. 147.

revelation. The resources of the Old Testament bear rich witness to the beauty and wonder both of authority and God's Law. This is surely part of the case for both authority and law.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Human Identity in Divine Relationships

THE MATTER OF IDENTITY

The word 'identity' derives from *idem* 'the same', and *entitas*, from which we have our word 'entity', that is, a thing as it essentially is, hence 'the quality or condition of being the same; absolute or essential sameness' (*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*). Toffler's book *Future Shock*¹ shows the difficulty human beings have in working out their identity in this age in which so many changes are taking place, and at such an accelerated momentum. In particular the rapid changes one person may have to experience in vocation and in location from time to time are bewildering. 'Identity crisis' is a well-known term today. Doubtless none of this is entirely new: Cain had to face a more difficult vocation and a terrifying location. Abraham was uprooted from his former culture and opted for a nomadic life

¹ Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*, Pan Books, London, 1972.

(cf. Heb. 11:8–10). Nomadic tribes have an exacting culture and a disciplined way of life under the constant threat of losing their basic identity; for example, the Gypsies and the Bedouins. The industrial revolution of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has forced human beings, and even their cultures, to learn to adapt to changing conditions. The rapid advance of technology, and the shrinking of the world to a global village via modern media, means that the human race is presented with ever-changing conditions and situations; the question being whether it adapts quickly enough to retain sanity, good mental health and a communal and personal sense of identity. The crises of famines, earthquakes, plagues, wars and even genocides are a few of the tragedies which face mankind continually. Even so, the human race seems to be incredibly resilient and adaptive to the changes it has known in its history.

PERSONAL HUMAN IDENTITY FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

What concerns us in this chapter are the biblical principles of personal identity in the face of Divine and human relationships.² Whatever more secular disciplines may tell us regarding human personality identity—and they tell us much—there is something about the creation of Man, the fall and restoration of Man, and the final destiny of redeemed Man which is of great

² For the purposes of this book we assume that the relationships of the Triune God, both internal and external, are, ontologically, the relationships humans ought to have with God, with others, and with themselves.

importance to our subject. The identity of Man,³ not only as an abstract entity, but also as an intimate personal entity, is something that we can learn best from Scripture; that is, Man being created in the image of God, and the implications and ramifications of that act, as also his continuance in the presence of God. Briefly we here set out these relationships as we assess their nature by the biblical descriptions of creation, the Fall, and through present salvation and ultimate adoption of sons; that is, the ultimate redemption of the body (Rom. 8:23; cf. Phil. 3:21):

- (a) By creation Man, being made in God's image, has total affinity with Him. In him is that which on the human level corresponds with God on the Divine level. Man—man—woman, one-flesh—is a pluralistic entity corresponding to God's innate plurality. Just as Father, Son and Holy Spirit have differentiation, so do man and woman—as Man. Each person is in some sense pluralistic—that is, self-conscious, able to ruminate with and within him/her self—and each person has remarkable differentiation.
- (b) By the Fall this total relationship was broken between Man and God, Man within the race (as

³ The present *psychological* search for identity which some undertake cannot be entirely satisfactory, since man is more than a psychological entity. Identity is determined by many things; namely, the various elements with which one is identified by God, and with which the person seeks to identify him/her self. It seems obvious that the less self-consciousness there is concerning identity, the more simple and real will be a person's true identity. The very fact that we seek to know our identity tells us a story; namely, that we are unsure of ourselves as persons.

male–female) and each person within him/her self. Even so, all human beings ‘live and move and have their being’ in God (Acts 17:28). This fact is important, as no one can ‘have being’ outside of God, that is, have true being.

- (c) By salvation Man is reconciled and the male–female entity resumes true relationships and the ‘divided self’⁴ of a person is brought to unity. Even so, the renewed identity in God is, firstly, in the context of a curse as yet unremoved, that is, not rescinded; and secondly, the powers of evil being present and seeking continually to bring disharmony. This is aided by their attempts to rouse the flesh into producing the old patterns of the old humanity; for example, anger, division, etc.—such as in ‘the works of the flesh’.⁵
- (d) Relating to ‘(c)’ Man now has his identity in God, in the community of the church, as the renewed ‘male–female, one-flesh entity’, and a changed relationship with society and the whole creation. We will seek shortly to develop all aspects of this renewed identity.
- (e) In the new world (the new heaven and the new earth, that is, in the new age), every person’s identity will be total; each having come to full maturity

⁴ See also R. D. Laing’s *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1965.

⁵ Technically, theologically, the ‘old humanity’ and its equivalent ‘the flesh’ have been put out of action (destroyed) by the work of the Cross in ‘regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit’ (Titus 3:5). In practical experience they can be seen to be stimulated by evil powers (cf. Gal. 5:16–21) but defeated by the present action of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 6:16–18).

in glorification;⁶ in having received the heritage of all things (Rev. 21:7); being in the family of God and the holy city; and in being a member of the ‘kingdom of priests unto God’. Biblically this new identity, which we may call a *revealed* identity, is promised in Scripture; for example, I Corinthians 13:12; Revelation 2:17; 3:12; Hebrews 11:39–40; Philippians 3:21; I John 3:3; II Corinthians 4:16 (cf. 3:18).

We will need to develop some of these ideas we have just set out.

MAN’S IDENTITY IN GOD

Man is not truly man without God. When he broke off relationship with God (that is, ‘died to God and came alive to himself’) he ceased to be fully human, in that he had ‘died’. In one sense he is never fully without God (Acts 17:28; but cf. Eph. 2:12; Ps. 14:1–2), but in another sense he is. Cain, though cast out from the presence⁷ of God, could still exist. Abel, who was equally a fallen creature, is numbered with those who lived ‘by faith’ (cf. Heb. 11:4–40) and so related to God, though

⁶ Man does not achieve—or receive—his full identity until glorified (cf. Rev. 2:17; 3:12). It is then that it will be revealed to the person.

⁷ We need to know what *presence* means in Genesis 4:14, 16. Psalm 139 insists that there is nowhere where God is not, but even there the idea is not primarily geographic or locational but ‘present to’ in the relational sense and in the sense of providential care. In Matthew 5:43–48 Jesus is saying that God is always present in the providential sense to all sinners as well as to His children. On the whole matter of *presence* see my *The Everlasting Presence* (NCPI, 1990).

not by sight. Man in this state cannot be aware of his true identity. Every person has, of course, self-consciousness, but self-consciousness does not necessarily mean true awareness of one's identity. Self-consciousness in some cases can retard knowledge of identity, as each person needs the aid of others in understanding him/her self.

Identity Lies in Relational Hierarchy⁸

This is not immediately apparent. Most hold the idea that to be autonomous is to assure self-identity, but biblically identity obtains only in relationship with God, others and oneself.⁹ The statement of Romans 14:7, 'None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself', is not necessarily an anthropological one, but ultimately it amounts to one of that order. Jeremiah 10:23 says that the way of a Man is not in himself, that is, it is in him only in relationship with God. Not fully knowing God prevents us from fully being human

⁸ For an extended presentation of the matter of hierarchy see my paper 'The Matter of Hierarchy—Functional and Relational' (Pastors' Study Group, NCPI, August 6, 1990).

⁹ When we say that personal identity only obtains in relationship with God and others, we are saying that hierarchy is essential for all relational activity. This casts a new light on hierarchy. In fact it transforms our understanding of it. Being one with all the human race we can be at one with our personal selves. We do not have to establish this relational network—it is already there. This means that there is no longer any existential loneliness. Of course, in a world of fallen human creatures and redeemed creatures who are imperfect there will be hitches and impediments in relationships, but we do not have to create the unity which came through creation and has been renewed through redemption. We simply have to avail ourselves of it; that is, 'If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all' (Rom. 12:18).

(Prov. 30:1–4). However, as we examine the nature of God we see that He has His unity in three Persons, and that these three are in hierarchical order of Father, Son and Holy Spirit,¹⁰ as is evident from the New Testament. Man, being in the image of God, must reflect the Divine hierarchy. Certainly it is clear that since God created him he is in hierarchical order with God. The position of the man before woman was created from him means that the woman is in hierarchical relationship with him. Just as in the Godhead hierarchy does not mean that the descending order of ordination infers a descending order of superiority, so in the man-and-woman hierarchy there is none. It is a matter of function and not of nature or essence.

In I Corinthians 11:3 Paul speaks of the hierarchy of the Father, of Christ, of the man and of the woman. We have talked much about hierarchy in previous chapters, but now we come to look at it in terms of human identity, and to see that it is related to the doing of God's will—a matter we will look at in our next chapter as it relates to *vocation*. Each hierarchy is a dynamic social entity of love which is purposive and functional in the will of God, so that all relationships are in unity and are essential to the true working of the entity and the fulfilment of the will of God. It is in this relationship and this vocation that true human identity has both its origin and being. Hierarchy also relates to sociality, both human and Divine, and, in turn, to the Law of God. There is no room inside a hierarchy for the autonomous

¹⁰ We will not endeavour to work this out now, but see the already cited Pastors' Study Group Paper. This contains a full description of hierarchy, including the Divine hierarchy.

independence of any member from the others, for all are bound together. The beauty of true hierarchy is that every member is not only interrelated with all, but is concentrated on every other member, and indeed the identity of each is wholly dependent upon this hierarchical relationship. This mutuality preserves the hierarchy from individualistic domination by one of the other. Of course, this cannot happen if the mutuality is not that of Divine love. Only in mutuality is true sociality: only in true sociality is mutuality. The love that a person has for God or a fellow person must be Divine *agape*, and that *agape* has its circulatory movement throughout the hierarchy in what has been called *perichoresis* and *circumincessio*.¹¹

Authority, Law and Human Identity

If we understand hierarchy, we will see that it is wholly against anarchy or forms of government which are independent of the Divine order.¹² Since all true hierarchy is rooted in God—that is, comes down from above—we must see that it is linked with authority and law. We must not understand authority as being authoritarian—that is, authority for its own sake—but as being for the sake of those others who are under its

¹¹ For detailed explanation see chapter 10, p. 103.

¹² By the statement ‘wholly against anarchy, etc.’ we simply mean that the only ontological order is that which God brought into being. In history there have been many forms of government, of law and of order, and probably none of these even approximates the ontological order. Even so, these operate within the sovereignty of God, so that they are ‘allowed’ (cf. Rev. 13:7; Dan. 7:23–27) but they cannot prevail because of their innate fallibility.

hierarchical direction.¹³ The Law of God must ultimately be seen to be the law of love, and nothing else. Love is commanded, as both Jesus and John insist (John 13:34; 15:12; I John 2:7ff.; 3:11ff.; 5:2–3). As we have seen, the whole hierarchy is a dynamic entity of love, and since love is the fulfilling of the law there can be no talk of domination within the hierarchy; that is, no one has dominion over the sovereignty of other persons (cf. II Cor. 1:24; I Pet. 5:3). It is clear from I Thessalonians 5:12–13 and Hebrews 13:7, 17 (cf. I Tim. 3:1–7; 5:17; Titus 1:7–9; I Pet. 5:1–3), that leadership is a matter of love. It is clear that the one who would be first must be servant, as Jesus so clearly intimated.

We conclude, then, that authority, law, order and hierarchy are the environment and context in which the identity of persons has its full liberty and development.

THE COMMUNITY OF CHRIST AND THE IDENTITY OF ITS MEMBERS

We come now to the heart of the matter. Each person has his or her full identity in God. Reconciliation with God through the gospel (Rom. 5:1, 2, 10, 11; II Cor. 5:19; Eph. 2:14–18; Col. 1:19–22) is sacramentally effected through baptism, as believers are ‘called into the fellowship of his Son’ (I Cor. 1:9); that is, are baptised

¹³ Here we have the revelation of Jesus that all the law and prophets depended upon the two-fold command to love God with all one’s being and—consequently—one’s neighbour as oneself. Paul and James see the law of God and the law of Christ as being wholly the law of love (Rom. 13:8–10; Gal. 5:13–14; James 1:22–25; 2:8–13).

into the Tri-unity of the Name (Matt. 28:19)¹⁴ and into the one body by the Spirit (I Cor. 12:13), and so partake of the seven elements of unity as set forth in Ephesians 4:1–6 (cf. Phil. 2:1–7). The New Testament teaches that the three Persons of the Godhead dwell in the church—the community of the Father, the Son and the Spirit—and that each person of that community dwells in the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Spirit. This is variously described as ‘abiding’,¹⁵ ‘fellowship with God’¹⁶ and ‘partaking of the divine nature’.¹⁷

Human identity—as we have said—derives from being one (identified) with God. The order of *nature* is that God creates us and makes us one with Him, for He has determined to be one with us. The order of *grace* is that God identifies with us in Jesus Christ who is ‘Immanuel’ (cf. Matt. 1:21–23; Isa. 7:14; cf. Rom. 8:3; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 2:14), since he ‘tabernacles amongst us’ (John 1:14). This identification *with* us (cf. II Cor. 5:14, 21) was also *for* us (Rom. 8:1–3; Gal. 1:4; 2:20; etc.), so that we might be one *with* Him (II Cor. 5:14). Thus—we repeat—the union of His elect people with Him

¹⁴ Note that in this reference (Matt. 28:19) it is into ‘the name’ and not ‘the names’ that the nations are to be baptized. Man being created in the image of God and brought into being through the three Persons, must have meant that the Fall brought a break in relationship to the three Persons. Baptism brings the baptized person back into relationship with the Father, the Son and the Spirit. This must mean a wholesome reunification of ‘the divided self’ as the person becomes one with the Triune God.

¹⁵ ‘Abiding’, ‘indwelling’, ‘living in’, ‘making home in’ are synonymous. The ideas and verbs can be found in such Scriptures as John 14:17, 23; 15:1–11; 17:21; Romans 8:9–11; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 1:3ff.; 2:21; 4:6; Colossians 1:27; 3:3; I John 2:27; 3:24; 4:13, 15, 16.

¹⁶ I John 1:3.

¹⁷ II Peter 1:4 (cf. I Cor. 1:9).

means that we have come to our true identity *in* Him. The identification of ‘*in* Christ’ releases us from the identification of ‘*in* Adam’.¹⁸ To be *in* Christ has both personal and corporate connotation. To be *in* Christ and to have Christ *in* us (Gal. 2:20)¹⁹ makes us one with one another, since we are ‘members one of another’,²⁰ that is, we are organically members joined in a more-than-human mutuality, and this effected by the seven unifying elements of Ephesians 4:1–6. The Spirit is the spirit of unity, of love and of fellowship, so he enables us to have our identity in identification with all others.

We conclude, then, that our identity derives from being one with God, one with others, one with creation and one with one’s self. Notice we say ‘derives from’, because just the relationships are not our identity. As we will see, each of us is unique, and is a person—and a vital one at that. We now look at the things with which we are identified and which enable us to realise who we are.

THE PERSON SUBSISTING AND FUNCTIONING

If we look at God, in whose image we are made, we see theologically that God subsists (His ontological Being)

¹⁸ Romans 5:12–21 (with I Cor. 15:22, 45–49) is important as our true identification, not only eschatologically but also in the present.

¹⁹ Galatians 2:20, ‘I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me’, is the end of the individualism which stemmed from the Fall. Total identification with Christ and union with him are the one, and the basis and source of an entirely new life.

²⁰ See I Corinthians 12:12–27; Ephesians 2:16–22; 4:15, 16, 25; I Peter 2:3–10, which show the unity and the oneness of the brethren and the interrelatedness of everyone.

and acts (His economic or revelational Being). This theological description must include the fact that God is One, and One as both subsisting and acting. God cannot be without doing. The statement ‘who was and is and is to come’ is not a statement of His continuity in time, but of His never-ceasing action, the action itself being purposive and *telos*-oriented.

Man, being ‘the image and glory of God’, both subsists and acts. He subsists in God and he acts in God. His identity is then a *being* and a *doing* entity. As created Man he is always developing as he moves towards his destined maturation, that is, the glorification God will give to him. This drive for the goal of maturity is an often-mentioned one in the New Testament. Again, subsisting and acting are two sides of the one coin—so to speak. All true action is in God, and stems from the indwelling of the Persons in the person, and the person indwelling Them. In particular the person works with the whole community of Christ. This community is at once *royal* (i.e. of the Kingdom of God, cf. Exod. 19:5; I Pet. 2:9–10), *priestly* (I Pet. 2:4–10)²¹ and *prophetic* (Acts 2:17–18; Joel 2:28–32; cf. Num. 11:29).²² It is this because Christ is Prophet, Priest and King, so that the ‘not I, but Christ who lives in me’ has its outworking in the Person of Christ. Since these three offices are

²¹ Note that the doctrine of ‘the priesthood of *all* believers’ is not the doctrine of ‘the priesthood of *every* believer’. In the NT church no one person is a priest in the ministry of the church, but all are involved together as participators in ‘a kingdom of priests’ (Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 22:5; cf. Isa. 61:6).

²² We do not have time here to develop the prophetic, priestly and kingly character and role of the people of God. See my *Christ’s People in Today’s World* (NCPI, 1985, sec. 3, pp. 71–141).

acting ones, the person in Christ—along with all the community of Christ—will be doing what Christ is doing. *In the being and the doing in Christ the identity of the person is being realised*. That is, the innate identity of any person—the particular combination of all things which pertain to that one, which constitutes his/her uniqueness in the given sovereignty of that person’s being—is only realised in the progressive fulfilment of that person as he or she lives within the will and purpose of God. In this sense identity is teleological.

THE ULTIMATE IDENTITY OF THE PERSON

For Paul, his ‘I’ was not an egotistical²³ entity. To say ‘the Son of God, who loved *me* and gave himself for *me*’ sets his ‘I’ out as distinctive. His personality is not lost or homogenised in the community of Christ, but rather is etched more strongly. Whilst Paul is a person for all persons, and is by no means an individualist, yet he is clearly conscious of having his own identity, and faces both the responsibility and the joy that it brings. Christ’s use of the ‘I’ is numerous and significant, and none of it is egocentric. No one was more self-conscious—in the good sense of that term—and yet none was so self-giving for others as he. It is difficult to describe his identity apart from his relationship with the Father and the Spirit, and this relationship does

²³ Literally the ‘I’ which constitutes a person is egotistical, but here we mean that when one—for example, St Paul—is not ego-centred then that one is not egotistical. The ego (‘I’) of a person is not realized in and by egocentricity but its essential being is total and healthy when it is ‘other-person centred’, that is, ‘other-person concentred’.

not so much identify him by use of the terms ‘Son’, ‘Servant’, ‘Lord’, etc. as he gives meaning, content and colour to those terms. It is thus difficult in relationship to him—and for that matter, anyone—to describe his identity. Even so, that identity is remarkably evident and is not liable to be confused with the identity of any other.

When we go to the passage of Psalm 139:13–18 we have the reality of personal identity expounded. Science tells us that the DNA of a given person is different from all others, as also that person’s fingerprints, and—in fact—the personal combination of weight, height and physical dimensions. This being so, each person is unique. No two persons are ever identical in these regards. The psalmist in this 139th Psalm says it was God who gave the proportions of the person to the person, and it was God who formed the days of that person ‘when as yet there was none of them’. Is this, then, why each person delights in what he or she is, and can never surrender that reality—not even under the most terrible pressure? What is clear from this Psalm is that *identity and destiny are inseparably bound together*. Indeed they are the one.

This remarkable fact is borne out in Revelation 2:17 and 3:12.²⁴ Revelation 2:17 says, ‘To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it’.

²⁴ In Revelation chapters 2 and 3 there are seven promises given to the conqueror or overcomer, and to these is added Revelation 21:7. These eight promises relate to the person’s destiny and thus to that one’s identity. They are all keys to the person, and keys to any one’s destiny. Both identity and destiny are gifts of God.

Commentators are divided as to whether this ‘new name’ is that of Christ or the recipient of the white stone. Revelation 3:12 speaks of the person having ‘the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, and . . . my own new name’, that is, ‘the name’ means the *identity* of ‘my God’, of ‘the city of my God’ and of ‘me’—meaning Christ. It seems reasonable to say that it is the name of the recipient of the white stone, which some think to be an invitation to the wedding feast of the Bride and the Lamb. It is a sort of ‘identity card’. H. Hoeksema says:

He shall be given a new name, expressive of his new and eternal being, a name which he alone shall be able to know, a name that determines exactly his personal place in that blessed throng that shall once gather around the throne of God and the Lamb and reveal in all its fulness the splendour and image of our God.²⁵

Some other commentators say similar things. Commentators on Revelation 3:12 see ‘the new name’ in the same light—that is, the identity of God, of the holy city and of Christ.

What is significant is that no one knows the name written on the white stone except the one who receives it, so that if it is that person’s name, then he/she now has something revealed to him or her which was not previously known. It would appear that one at last will know himself/herself, that is, the personal identity and all that it implies. If it is the name of Christ that is meant in 2:17, then it would amount to the same thing,

²⁵ *An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, Reformed Free Publish-ing Association, Grand Rapids, 1969, p. 94.

since, in the light of I Corinthians 13:12 and I John 3:2, to see Christ in the ultimate is to be truly like him, and to know him, as one also is known by him.

The rich and wonderful conclusion that we draw is that *each person has his or her unique identity; that it is significant for one's being and doing; and that eventually one will know truly who one is, and what one is about, both in time and eternity.* The teaching, sharing, pastoral and counselling value of this cannot be computed.

THE MATTER OF AUTHENTIC HUMAN EGO

We have rightly made much—above—of our identification with the Persons of the Trinity—since it is by such identification that we are one with God, and so one with one another and our personal selves. Seeing the dangers of egocentricity—self-preoccupation, self-extension, and other forms of selfishness—we sometimes back away from any consideration of what we call ‘self’. The truth which we have seen is that we have been given a special—a unique—identity; that is, a self which is not to be despised any more than it is to be vaunted. When Paul enjoins us to have a sane estimate of ourselves,²⁶ he is saying something other than the

²⁶ In Romans 12:3 Paul says, ‘For by the grace given to me I bid every one among you not think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him’. Doubtless he is saying that we ought not to overestimate ourselves, but he is not suggesting, either, that we underestimate ourselves. His constant use of the term ‘I’ has led some to think he was egotistical, which was not true. Even so, he was jealous for that authentic ‘I’ of his being, as we all ought to be.

mystics who wish to negate themselves, something other than the dualists of Eastern religions who wish to have the self absorbed into the great Self of a pantheistic, all-pervading Deity. Paul (along with other Christian writers) sees that we are responsible to be ourselves, we cannot escape the demands which come because we are unique entities. In fact, it is our joy to be wholly ourselves, and far from bringing us into conflict with God or others, it makes us one with them.

There is a tension in being an entity among other entities, but we saw that being part of a rich and vast relational network is what guarantees our being authentic. Even so, the tension remains. Its resolution lies in our identity with God, dwelling in Him as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and being indwelt by God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is when we regard the ‘I AM’ of God that we lose fear of our own personal ‘I am’. Made in the image of God we can rightly say ‘I am’ as He says ‘I AM’. This truth is brought to us more intimately by Jesus, who, in John’s Gospel, utters ‘I am’ many times. In the Greek the ‘I am’ saying is noted for its *ego eimi*, that is, its emphatic ‘I am’.²⁷ He says:

- (a) ‘I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst’; ‘I am the bread of life . . . This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die’ (6:35, 50).

²⁷ In many languages the personal pronouns (I, he, she, you, they) do not necessarily have to be used, as the form of the verb determines number and gender. In Greek when the personal pronoun is used it emphasizes the person or persons. *Ego eimi* could be paraphrased ‘I, myself’.

- (b) 'I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'; 'As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world' (8:12; 9:5; cf. 1:4).
- (c) 'Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not heed them. I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture' (10:7–9).
- (d) 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep . . . I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep' (10:11, 14, 15).
- (e) 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die' (11:25–26).
- (f) 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me' (14:6).
- (g) 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser . . . I am the vine, you are branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing' (15:1, 5).

The 'I am' means—as in Exodus 3:14—'Uniquely I am', that is, no one else is these things—no one is the true bread, light, door, shepherd, resurrection, life, way

and truth, or the vine.²⁸ The claims are of marvellous dimensions. To use a term, Jesus is the *archetypal* bread, light, door, shepherd, resurrection, life, way and truth, or the vine. For example, bread does not get its meaning from itself, but from him who is the true bread. Earthly bread is an ectype of the heavenly.

Our purpose in showing the ego of Jesus is to argue from it that, as for him—Jesus—'ego' is not a wrong matter, but a right one. So, too, for us 'ego' is not a wrong matter but a right one. One does not exist without an ego. The ego is what one is. To become 'nothing' in the sense that one's centre of being and consciousness is annulled, made void, cancelled and made sterile is a foolish and dangerous idea. The truth is—paradoxically—that the more one is one's self, the less is one egocentric. The reason for this lies in the depths of the Divine Being—the Triune God—each Person of the Godhead is 'other-person centred', and even 'other-person centred'. This is the way the ego operates authentically. It is not primarily concerned for itself, but for others. It looks not on its own things, but on the things of others (Phil. 2:1–5). It esteems others better than itself in that it gives priority to others.

This is borne out in the Johannine use of 'I am'. If we look at them closely there is no pride in the claims, since all the forms of *ego eimi* are *for others*. Look at them—bread, light, door, shepherd, resurrection, life, way and truth, the vine. The bread gives life; light

²⁸ There are uses of the *ego eimi* in the Book of the Revelation. (cf. 1:17; 22:13, 16, where Jesus is 'the first and the last, and the living one'; 'the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end'; 'the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star'). These are tremendous claims, and are claims to unique personhood and identity.

transforms darkness; the door gives admission; the shepherd cares for the sheep; the resurrection is to 'abolish death and bring life and immortality to light'; the life is life-giving, it is the way *to* the Father, the truth *of* the Father and the *life* (way of being and doing) *of* the Father; the vine has its branches and gives to them both life and fruit-bearing. This is all genuine 'selflessness' or—put another way—the true actions of the true self. There can be no talk of negating the self. In so doing one would negate the true expressions of love—other-person centredness.

It is, then, a thrilling thing to know that we imitate Christ, and—even more—that we live in him and he lives in us. Our life is the life of Christ. In this our true identity finds its genuine expression and its full satisfaction. Thus we dispel the myth of the ego—that it is evil and fleshly—and we teach that true ego is a gift from God and the means of love-expression.

THE MATTER OF HUMAN IDENTITY IN FELLOWSHIP, TEACHING, PASTORAL AND COUNSELLING MINISTRY

So much lies at the root of human inferiority,²⁹ anger about that state, and reactions to hierarchy, authority

²⁹ We need to see that not all human beings are equal—a fact which would require homogeneity to make us so—but that all human beings are equally human. Inferiority springs from existential guilt, and existential guilt springs from the Fall ('all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God'), which means that we have come short of the glory of Man. Nothing can alter the matter of this guilt or the self-depreciation which springs from it, and self-atonement which the human person is compelled to attempt in order to achieve self-justification.

and law, which is failure to see the extraordinary worth of a human being. The evaluation humanism places on a human being is not realistic. The exaggerated and false value that egocentricity places on one's self is dangerous and leads to mental ill-health and often also to anti-sociality. No less dangerous is the endeavour of the mystics to lose their ego and be lost in the selfless sea of some idealised Nirvana. Personal worth in identity makes no place for the person being lost or merged into society, any more than it gives credence to individualism. True social being stems from the sociality of the Triune Godhead, and gives value to the differentiations that persons have in the economy of God. The reality of God's love for human beings, without conditions, does not mean Man is loved because he is valuable, or even valuable because he is loved. The reason lies in creation. Man has been created with thought, in wisdom, and each person has been given an identity which is unique, is functional and is essential to the plan and purpose of God, so that vocation and destiny³⁰ are one with identity.

The communication of this truth by persons of faith to persons in need means the release of them from bondage, and entrance into fellowship with God and the liberty of the glory of the sons of God.

IDENTITY, VOCATION AND DESTINY

Our next two chapters will attempt to deal with the relationship of identity to vocation and destiny. The

³⁰ Destiny, rightly understood, is a most powerful force for motivation and accomplishment. It gives reason for being, and hope for the endeavour.

mistake is often made of tackling the subject of authority and hierarchy apart from these three elements. They are all of the one piece, since they constitute the ethos and environment of life. Ignorance of any one of the five constituents virtually means ignorance of them all. Identity, vocation and destiny are three elements which are related to hope, and hope is one of the driving forces of life. The Scriptures inspire the children of God with powerful hope, so that life is not static, is not empty, is not dead.

As we have suggested above, one of the greatest thrills of human living is the knowledge that one is unique, that one has a contribution to make to the whole of humanity, to the process of history and to the *telos* of God, which no other person can make. To be inside the security of the hierarchy; under the protection of the leaders; never alone in regard to relationships; and always being in the environment of love—this is what makes life so rich. No wonder the writer of Hebrews said, ‘Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen’.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Matter of Human Vocation

THE PARADIGM OF VOCATION

Jesus once said, ‘My Father has always been working and I work’, meaning, ‘My Father has never not been working, and it is the same with me. I always work, and when I do, it is with the Father’. The writer of Hebrews quoted Psalm 40:6–8 of Jesus (10:5–7), ‘Then I said, “Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God,” as it is written of me in the roll of the book’. Psalm 40:8 has it, ‘I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart’. Notice that Fatherhood, Sonship, the will of God, delighted obedience and law are one together.¹ We again introduce the word ‘authority’ because Jesus understood himself as being under the Father and as commanded by

¹ We have seen in previous studies that authority, the will of God, and the law are intimately related. Psalms 1, 19 and 119 show that love of God is the basis for obedience, stemming first from God’s love for us. Only this kills the authoritarian view of God and the legal view of law. When the will of God is seen to be teleological then the wonder of vocation is understood.

the Father (John 10:17–18; 14:30–31). He worked *for* the Father as he worked *with* the Father. He, then, is our pattern for life (cf. Eph. 5:1–2; I Cor. 11:1).

We have seen that the Father, the Son and the Spirit are continually working—and working as one—in creation, redemption and restoration. God, then—as the Triune God—can be called *the* Worker. Doing work does not demean Him, but His works are His glory (Matt. 5:16). Time and again in the Psalms the thought comes through, ‘All your works praise You’.

We must look at *the kind of work* the Father is doing. It is always work *for* us, first in bringing us into being, in giving us life by the breath of His mouth, and then it is work sustaining us—the work we call providence, and is done even in the face of our fallenness. It is redemptive work for us—work that transforms us, work that is done in us by revelation and the Holy Spirit. It is never a work that allows us to become complacent in the fact of ourselves. It is always calling us to know God and to love Him, to know our fellow creatures and to love them. It is always work we do for others, and in doing we are showing a right love for, and a correct estimate of, ourselves—as is seen in such passages as Romans 12:3ff., Philippians 2:1–8 and Colossians 3:12–17.

We are, then, called to work. Ephesians 2:8–10 tells us that it is not only grace which has saved us—through faith—but grace leads us on to fulfil those works which God has planned for us beforehand, and which in His grace and mercy He has now given us to do (cf. II Cor. 4:1; Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:11–14). In Christ, in the Holy Spirit, and in the Father we can scarcely do other than the works commanded. If we were not permitted—yes,

urged—to do such works, we would be bereft of the essence of true humanity, true likeness to God who always works for others. Sadly enough the word ‘work’ for many folk is a hard word—as hard almost as ‘law’, ‘authority’ and ‘hierarchy’. Yet, rightly understood, doing work is a delight. It may well be linked in the mind of some with the terms of the curse put upon the first couple, and the man in particular:

... cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground (Gen. 3:17–19).

We might expect, then, that those who rebel against the excellent order of God for the creation would also rebel against work. Paul’s sharp injunction for those who refused to work was, ‘If any one will not work, let him not eat’. This was not just the injunction to punish a person who would not work, nor even a refusal to encourage him in sin, but it was intended to draw that person back into true vocation and restore to him the true purpose of living, in living.

VOCATION AND DIGNITY

Probably none of us likes overwork, but most of us find work attractive, especially the kind of work which is pleasant to do. It may be difficult and yet be pleasant and rewarding. We have seen that marriage is related to vocation, for when God blessed Man—the man–woman entity—He gave them their directive for life in terms of Genesis 1:28 (Gen. 9:1–7; cf. Ps. 8:3f.). To be God is to

be *the* Worker. To be Man is to be a worker, since Man is in the image of God. To be truly human is truly to work. People who are intentional 'layabouts' are people without direction who can easily be given over to boredom and mischief. Most of all they can fail to fulfil that of themselves which is most distinctive—their call to be partners with God in the work that is necessary for the good of creation, and for the redemption and glorification of all things—Man included.

Jesus—our paradigm—*loved to do the Father's will*. The Father to him was no harsh martinet, but the One with whom he was one. His Father had loved him before the foundation of the world and had given him glory—that is, honour and dignity. He also honoured the Father and was glad to be part of the outworking of the Father's plan for His creation, not only by sharing in that creational act but by going on to redeem humanity and ultimately restore the whole creation by the act of glorification. It is only when we grasp the joy of service that we come into the dignity of our humanity.

As we have said above, it is the *kind* of work Jesus does that makes work so rich. *It was not work for himself.*² We often think it a good thing to work for others, without seeing that we sometimes use others and the work we do for them to enhance our image before men.³ That is why Jesus said, 'Beware of practising your piety

² As we have seen previously, to belong to God, to be in His will and to obey Him means that we have been transformed from self-regarding, egocentric, ego-extending persons into those who are *other-person centred*. This is the height of true human living.

³ It is not for us to judge the motives of the hearts of others when they do works, especially works for others, but we must be critical of work which vaunts the doer and not the one for whom it is done. The work of Christ touches human beings in the depths of their beings, in the place of need, and it effects rich transformation in the person. Jesus fed the 5,000 because they were hungry. That was his primary purpose. When they desired him to give them bread as a duty, and to protect them from the economic difficulties and assure them of no suffering, then he told them that they were looking for the bread which is temporal and effects nothing of lasting nature. Only the bread of God gives continuing life to the soul.

before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven'. In heaven it is not the work that commends us, but the work that is done out of love and is not done for self-justification and for people's praise. So we are not to give alms in the sight of the people. We are not to vaunt our piety in their eyes, and if we do, then God will not account it to be true piety, true prayer. That does not mean that we are not to give alms, not practise piety, not to pray to the Father. We are to do these things, but not for the praise of men. When we do them quietly and for the praise of God then our reward will be in the very doing of them, as well as the character we acquire along the way. Our greatest joy will ultimately be that when we quit this arena of work our deeds will follow us, our reward will be great in heaven, that is, we will enter into the joy of our Lord. Our praise will surely be of God who has prepared the Kingdom for us before even creating the universe. He has always had us in His heart and mind, has written down our names in the book of life, and then He will show us His face.

This will be the ultimate and true dignity that we will know. Surely this is the same 'joy that was set before him' and which caused him to 'endure the cross and despise the shame'.

VOCATION IS ALL

In all this we are saying that the whole race is called to be God's creation-partner, to be His covenant-partner and to have the grace and mercy of ministry.⁴ If we are left to make plans for ourselves, for our own advancement, and for life beyond this one, then we will be denying ourselves the highest and best of all. In our previous chapter we spoke of our true identity, that each person is unique, not only in form but also in destiny. That is, each one of us has a unique contribution to make. Each one knows deeply down in himself or herself that no other can be or give just what he or she can be and give. This gift and ability is of God. Equality of humanity—if there be such a thing—is not equality of gift or vocation. As we will shortly see, we have a common calling since we are called to the same things—sonship, light, liberty, holiness, patient endurance, the fellowship of His Son—but each has a different calling in regard to the unique contribution each makes.

If we lose that personal and intimate sense of identity then all vocation is homogenised, and it has a dreary sameness about it. Uniformity in identity takes the place of unity in diversity. If God gives distinctiveness to the venation of every leaf, to the fingerprint of every finger, and to the mysterious DNA, then how thrilling it is to be

⁴ In the NT, ministry—that is, serving others—is always of grace (Rom. 12:3; I Cor. 15:10; I Tim. 1:12–14) and of mercy (II Cor. 4:1; I Tim. 1:15–17). It is grace that we are not left to do pointless work, or ineffective labour, or pointless endeavour. Ministry is always geared to the ultimate goal and *telos*—the glorious will of God which is for the creation, for the human race.

a distinctive person, no matter how 'the world around us tries to squeeze us into its own mould'.⁵

Above we talked about not seeking the praise of men but of God. I am sure, too, that often our seeking the praise of men is an exercise—perverted though it may be—in trying to convince ourselves we are something, that we have something special to offer the world in which we live. I am sure that there is a dread—somewhere deep down in the human heart—of wasting the life we have been given, wasting its special purpose. We go about a right thing in a wrong way, trying to fulfil it. For many years I have listened to artists—painters and sculptors—writers of prose, poetry, fiction and fact, as well as to creative musicians, dancers, architects and the like, and I have heard them say that they have always felt their calling to their vocation, always been sure they have been given special gifts, always certain that to deny such a calling would be to deny themselves—let alone their fellow creatures.⁶ That has intrigued me, because they have sounded like any person of godly faith—sure that they have not been called to while away the time on this planet, but dedicated before time by this mysterious calling of God. I am sure that they have been called to a special work in life, and the fact that many of them live profligate and immoral

⁵ See J. B. Phillips's famous paraphrase of Romans 12:2 in his *Letters to Young Churches* (Geoffrey Bles, London, 1950).

⁶ Perhaps we might feel that artists, writers and musicians who are not people of spiritual faith may not be as dedicated as those who are. This is by no means the case. So-called 'secular' persons are often more passionate and devoted to their professions than are some equivalent Christians. This should convince us that calling (vocation) is a dynamic element in human experience.

lives does not cancel that calling. It is always a pity when—in seeking to fulfil that calling—we seek human plaudits for their own sake, when we miss ‘the many-splendoured thing’—as Francis Thompson put it—for the real thing, the useful and purposeful identity in vocation.

What we are trying to show here is that the person who pursues individuality for its own sake, who seeks to be autonomous and yet fulfil the purposes of his given identity, misses the basic truth that it can only be done in concert with all others, can only be accomplished under guiding and assisting authority, and is done by adhering to principles of law. Again, we need to let Psalms 1, 19 and 119 be our teachers.

THE THEOLOGICAL NATURE OF CALLING⁷

The Effectual Calling of God is True Vocation

The term ‘vocation’ which I have been using is not—so far as I am aware—used in translations of the New Testament. The term used there is ‘calling’ (*klesis*), but

⁷ Here I would like to cite my *God’s Calling: Our Response* (NCPI, 1993) for a fuller theological setting out of calling. I have attempted to avoid the closed system of philosophical Calvinism, including its dangers of fatalistic determinism—a fault Calvin never evinced. I believe we should give the subject more attention than we are doing today. Not only was it a darling of the Reformers, but it was the basis of modern missions—to wit the opening up of Calvinism by Jonathan Edwards, his friend and student David Brainerd, and the passion for saving men and women which took place as a result of the movement in the eighteenth century. In the section ‘The Theological Nature of Calling’, I have drawn heavily on this little work *God’s Calling: Our Response*.

the meaning is the same. God calls in order to fulfil His will for the history of the creation. That is, He will do what He will do:

... I am God, and there is none like me,
 declaring the end from the beginning
 and from ancient times things not yet done,
 saying, ‘My counsel shall stand,
 and I will accomplish all my purpose
 ... I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass;
 I have purposed, and I will do it’ (Isa. 46:9–11).

Israel speaks in the same spirit, acknowledging all that it has and is, is by the sovereign choice of God:

Listen to me, O coastlands,
 and hearken, you peoples from afar.
 The LORD *called* me from the womb,
 from the body of my mother he named my name.
 He made my mouth like a sharp sword,
 in the shadow of his hand he hid me;
 he made me a polished arrow,
 in his quiver he hid me away.
 And he said to me, ‘You are my servant,
 Israel, in whom I will be glorified’ (Isa. 49:1–3).

In regard to creation and calling, Isaiah 40:26 says, ‘Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, *calling them all by name*’. In Isaiah 48:13, God says, ‘My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I *call* to them, they stand forth together’. Amos 5:8 and 9:6 repeat this principle. In Genesis 1:5, 8, and 10, God calls certain things by name, and that is what they must then be, much in the same way that Adam named the animals. In Hebrews

11:8, Abraham obeyed God when he was called to go to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance. In Isaiah 51:2, God says, 'For when he was but *one* I called him, and I blessed him and made him *many*'. In regard to nations and persons, God calls them in their times and calls from the beginning to the end. Isaiah 41:4 asks, 'Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am He'.

Another example of call—corresponding to that of Israel—is in John 1:41–42. Here 'Simon, son of Jonas' is called Peter (*Petros*: cf. Matt. 16:18). His very character was to change by the calling of Christ. In one way it reminds us of Jacob wrestling with the angel and having his name (character) changed. Peter has an encounter with Jesus, but the matter has been planned before that time.

Calling throughout the New Testament is in the same spirit, that is, the elect are called from what they were into what they are intended to be, to do what is consonant with that call. If Israel was called from his mother's womb, so was Saul of Tarsus: 'But when he who had set me apart from before I was born, and had called me through his grace . . .'. Note the calling is prior to time, but the crisis of it happens within time, and is a personal happening. It goes without saying that there could be no such happening with fallen Man unless God were to take the initiative. God is known as 'God who calls' (Rom. 9:11; Gal. 5:8; cf. I Thess. 5:24). In II Timothy 1:9 we read, He 'called us with a holy calling . . . in Christ Jesus ages ago', and Paul adds, 'in virtue of his own purpose'. Other passages show that God purposed calling before time (cf. Eph. 1:4–14).

In one sense the whole of Man's history is in calling. It is all in accordance with 'the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago'. If God does not call, then Man is left to his own devices. Calls are recorded in regard to Abraham, Isaac, Israel—both as a nation and as the Suffering Servant—Moses, Samuel, Isaiah and Jeremiah. The prophets were personally called to their vocations. In Hosea 1:10 (cf. II Cor. 6:18), Israel's people are to be called 'sons of the living God', a statement which John echoes in his First Letter (3:1), 'See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are'.

The first wonderful thing about God's call is that it is immutable. Paul, in speaking of God's call to Israel (Rom. 11:28–29), said, 'As regards the gospel they are enemies of God, for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable'. The second wonderful thing about calling is that it is from God's side and establishes us for ever. That is, as Paul put it, ' . . . that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call', and ' . . . so it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy'. The third wonderful thing is that it is 'the upward call of God in Christ Jesus', that is, it is taking us up to the goal of history and the fulfilment of each called person. It assures us that what we are about is in the will of God.

Excursus on 'Effectual Calling'

The idea of 'effectual calling' is that God's grace is irresistible. That is, when God calls we respond. A

number of things seem to deny this idea of effectual calling. In Romans 10:21 Paul says, 'But of Israel he [God] says, "All day long have I held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people"'. Likewise Isaiah was called to preach although it would further harden the hearts of the hearers (Isa. 6:9–13). Jesus quoted this passage (cf. Luke 8:10). Jesus, in Luke 8:1–22, makes it clear that there are two kinds of people in an audience—those who have an ear to hear and those who do not. This idea is repeated in the seven letters in the Book of the Revelation. Effectual calling is calling to those who have an ear to hear. This is illustrated in Matthew 22:1–14, where the king called folk of high degree to his feast but they excused themselves from coming. He then sent his servants out to ask all kinds to come to the feast, to which many responded. The custom was for wedding guests to be distinguished by wedding garments, but a certain guest neglected to wear the required tunic. He was cast out. Jesus concluded, 'Many are called, but few are chosen'. We are not sure whether this refers primarily to the guest who refused to wear his identification mark, or those who rejected the call. What we do know is that all were called, but only some responded. The verb 'to call' obviously has two meanings—one, a general one for the call went out to all, and two, only those who had an ear to hear would hear. To the first there was no grace in the call; to the second it was all grace. Even so, the call is effective in that it polarises all who hear it—some one way, and some the other. God cannot be blamed for rejection of the call but the rejecters are under judgment. Those who hear are grateful and receive the blessings promised to them.

THE MANY ELEMENTS OF CALLING

In the New Testament there is continuity with calling in the Old Testament. We have seen that God called Abraham *into* covenant, and that all calls were then within covenant. Israel was to be called 'sons of the living God', but in Isaiah 43:6–7, God has called His sons and daughters from afar whom He has made for His glory. He has called Israel *in righteousness* (Isa. 42:6). He has called them to be witnesses (Isa. 43:10). So the list could be expanded.

The number of things into which the people of God have been called should be listed briefly, as they speak for themselves. Totalled, they tell a fascinating story. They are as follows:

- (a) Called into Christ's fellowship (I Cor. 1:9).
- (b) Called to be saints (Rom. 1:7).
- (c) Called into the kingdom and glory (I Thess. 2:12), that is, 'the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ' (II Thess. 2:14).
- (d) Called into eternal life (I Tim. 6:12) and into 'the promised eternal inheritance' (Heb. 9:15; cf. Phil. 3:14—'the upward call of God').
- (e) Called to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7).
- (f) Called unto holiness (I Thess. 4:7; 5:23, 24; II Thess. 2:13; cf. I Pet. 1:2; 2:9–10).
- (g) Called into light (I Pet. 2:9–10).

- (h) Called into sonship (I John 3:1–3; Rom. 9:26; cf. Hosea 1:10).
- (i) Called into being the people and the peoples of God (I Pet. 2:9–10; cf. Exod. 19:5; Rom. 9:24–26).
- (j) Called into patient endurance (I Pet. 2:19ff.; cf. Rev. 13:10; 14:12).
- (k) Called into service (Gal. 1:15; Rom. 1:1; cf. Acts 13:2).

The call has promises attached to it, that is, ‘He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ’. This is in the face of the call of God in Christ (I Cor. 1:26–31), where not many were wise, powerful and noble but were ‘weak in the world’, nevertheless they would ‘shame the wise’, ‘shame the strong’ and ‘bring to nothing things that are’. This is because ‘He who calls you is faithful’, and he will ‘sanctify you wholly’ and keep ‘your spirit, soul and body sound and blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ’ (I Thess. 5:23–24).

IDENTITY, VOCATION AND DESTINY

Since the calling and vocation are the one, they give special meaning to life. Nothing is fruitless, nothing is pointless. All is in the will of God. Rightly understood, all is rich, because purposeful. The value of being in the will of God is that it is the way of working to its maturity the thing we call identity. If we refuse our identity and the responsibility which goes with it, then we are like children who refuse to exercise their limbs,

who dislike the fatigue that comes with such exercise, and who seek to live at the easiest level possible. This would be the same in regard to exercising the mental powers that are theirs. Their characters would not develop strongly. The dislike of exercising the faculties given is based in what we think to be ‘suffering’. There is a certain ‘suffering’ in doing press-ups, but it develops the potential of the person. Likewise in the person who reckons that ‘the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed’. He knows that suffering—this ‘slight, momentary affliction’—is not for ever and ‘is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison’.

In this sense full identity is in the future—in what we call ‘the eschatological future’, the future of the end time. That future is what we call destiny but is shaped up in the present time through vocation and its outworking.

It is to this matter of destiny—so intimately linked with calling—that we now turn our attention.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Matter of Human Destiny

THE GOAL OF DESTINY: DESTINY THE GOAL

What do we understand by destiny? We have mentioned the thought that human beings do not wish their lives to be pointless and fruitless, yet few know how to go about anything other than preserving their lives in the present, making some kind of provision for themselves in the future—that is, for the days of retirement. Few know how to leave ‘footsteps on the sands of time’.¹ Something in us does not want to be forgotten. Milton’s words from the poem *Lycidas* tell us:

¹ The reference is, of course, from Longfellow’s poem, *A Psalm of Life*:

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footsteps on the sands of time.

I must admit the phrase ‘footsteps on the sands of time’ makes me smile, since the footprints will be quickly erased by wind or water.

Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
(That last infirmity of noble mind)
To scorn delights, and live laborious days;

but such fame is blasted by the happenings of ‘the blind Fury’:

But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,
And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
Comes the blind Fury with the abhorred shears,
And slits the thin-spun life.

So fame is not enough. Destiny is all. Paul says we must ‘seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God’. He continues, ‘Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth’ (Col. 3:1–2). In another place he tells us:

For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal (II Cor. 4:16–18).

Probably few people give themselves seriously to the matter of destiny, but it is essential we all should do so. Our destinies deeply influence our present living. Short-term goals certainly give present inspiration to many, but they are ephemeral. Athletes spend years training for gold and silver and bronze, whilst others have goals in academic attainments, commerce, politics, and the like, but these prove to be things of momentary ecstasy when they are achieved. It is the eternal destiny that matters, and into this can be woven many a temporal element of destiny. What we hope for has great impact upon us now—the way we live, the attitudes we have and the things we do.

What, then, should be our understanding of destiny? Is there a role-model for the same? How do we go about fulfilling the destiny planned for us by the heavenly Father?

THE PARADIGM OF DESTINY

The true example of destiny is Jesus Christ. If any man in history has been *the* man of destiny it has been he. He has been one who has both made destiny and arrived at his destiny, fulfilling it, and, in fact, this process is still in action. The New Testament teaches us that in him we fulfil our destiny. It also teaches us that he, in himself, is the world's destiny. This is because (i) *through* him all things were created (I Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2); (ii) *in* him all things were created (Col. 1:16); and (iii) all things we created *for* him (I Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16) and in him all things 'hold together', that is, subsist (Col. 1:17); that is, he upholds all things by the word of his power (Heb. 1:3). These statements are incredibly wonderful, for they tell us that all things had their beginnings in the Son, that he is their creator, that they arose from him, and that they are all *for* him, which can mean they are all *to* him or *unto* him; that is, in him lies their outcome, their goal, their destiny. Certainly this is the idea in Ephesians 1:9–11, where Paul says that all things are to be unified² in him, that is, find their goal

² The NT tells us that this same Christ will 'fill all things', that is, give them their substance and full being (cf. Eph. 4:7; 1:23; Col. 1:19; 2:3, 9). Things are 'empty' without him. He will reconcile all things, that is, from their disarray and disjunction caused by sin and rebellion, and the autonomous drive they have. This unity is what Paul speaks about in Ephesians 2:11–22. This shows us further that we can only have true identity and destiny in him.

and ultimate being in him. All things have their being and their identity in him, and only in him.

This great description of Christ tells us that unless we are in him we will have no great destiny. We only have authentic being in him, and it is in him we have hope—the hope of glory which is our true destiny (Col. 1:27). When Paul speaks of 'the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus' in Philippians 3:14, he shows us that it is 'the transformation of our bodies of humiliation so that they will be like his [Christ's] body of glory' (3:21). Our point is made, then, that our destiny is a sharing in Christ's destiny—something which is assured by the death of the Cross.

CALLED, FOREKNOWN, PREDESTINED, CONFORMED

Some readers may have found it remarkable in our last chapter that we did not quote Romans 8:28–30, since in the heart of these verses is calling. These important verses we now look at:

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

This famous passage is speaking only in regard to those who love God—not the general order of humanity. The ones mentioned are the called ones, the elect ones,

the ones whose destinies and whose destination have been set. The importance and comfort of this passage is that it assures the one who loves God that all the things essential to that person's salvation and ultimate destiny have been accomplished for him or her.

'Called according to his *purpose*' presupposes God's purpose for the person, and tells him or her that everything that is happening in the orbit of that life is being shaped up for the good of God's object of love. *Foreknowledge* is not something God knows before it happens in our 'time', for God is not caught in time. For Him to know a person is for Him to do His will for the person. This is seen in Galatians 4:8f., where to have come to *know* God is really for Him to have *known* the person. This is so in I Corinthians 8:3, 'If one loves God, one is *known* by him'; and the classic verse is Amos 3:2, 'You only have I *known* of all the families of the earth'. The sad side of all this is the 'not-knowing' of God, as seen in Matthew 7:21–23, 'And then will I declare to them, "*I never knew you*; depart from me, you evildoers"'.³

Predestination is that act of God by which He determines the salvation and destiny of those of His choice.³ It is God's

³ Section CF III, 1 of the *Westminster Confession* (George S. Hendry, *The Westminster Confession for Today, A Contemporary Interpretation*, SCM Press, London, 1960, p. 49) says:

God from eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away but rather established.

Article 17 of the Anglican Church (E. J. Bicknell, *A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*, Longmans, London, 1955, p. 218) says:

Predestination to Life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour. Wherefore, they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God be called according to God's purpose by his Spirit working in due season: they through grace obey the calling: they be justified freely: they be made sons of God by adoption: they be made like the image of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ: they walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity.

act of foreordaining whatever comes to pass. In simple terms it is setting a person's destiny or destination beforehand. This is, of course, greatly objected to by human beings who wish to handle their own destiny, and who do not agree with God doing so. Others interpret the concept in terms of fatalism—'What will be will be'—but it is not of this kind at all. In Ephesians 1:5 Paul said:

He destined us in love⁴ to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

As the godly consideration of Predestination, and our Election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God: so, for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's Predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the Devil doth thrust them either into desperation, or into wretchedness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation.

Furthermore, we must receive God's promises in such wise, as they be generally set forth to us in holy Scripture: and, in our doings, that Will of God is to be followed, which we have expressly declared unto us in the Word of God.

⁴ In some translations the 'in love' is linked with verse 4 in regard to choosing us to be holy before Him *in love*. It does not matter: all that Paul is talking about of God's predestining work before the world was made must be included in the phrase '*in love*'.

All that God does is *in love*. To think otherwise about *predestination* as an act of God is to misunderstand God. Philosophical rationalisations of predestination only serve to further confuse the minds of those who wonder how God can be love and only choose some. In this matter we shall have to trust God, and at the same time keep in mind that God does not have to choose anyone. It would not be grace were He forced to do so. There is much we do not yet understand, since ‘we see in a glass darkly’. Later we will know all. For the present we must believe He does all things *in love*, and not otherwise. If all is done in love—and there is no higher virtue or power than love—then His plan, His wisdom, His purpose, and His action of foreknowing, foreordaining and predestinating must be beyond reproach. Humility is required on our part, since it is only in humility that we can learn of God. For that matter, it is only in humility we truly learn anything.

Returning to predestination we now look at its goal: ‘to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren’. This has two remarkable elements:

- (a) *God’s plan is that we shall be conformed to the image of His Son*—this is the primary goal of history. What is it to be conformed to the image of His Son? It is to be like him in every way, that is, in character, in holiness, in power, in action, in fulfilling the Father’s will, in being an overcomer. This is seen in Revelation 21:7, where the one who overcomes is accounted by God as His son, and consequently that one inherits all things: the new heavens and the new earth. It also means to have ‘the liberty

of the glory of the children of God’, that is, to have full fellowship with the Triune God, and especially with God as Father.

- (b) *God’s plan is that Christ shall be the elder brother of all the glorified brethren*. On the one hand it means the Father will have many sons—all like *the Son*—and on the other, that the Son will not be alone in his Sonship. He will have brethren—be a brother to them.⁵ Both elder brother and younger brothers will have fellowship in love, and in the action which shall characterise the new age. This Prophet–Priest–King will have for himself a prophetic, priestly, royal Kingdom and Community. This will be the Family of God—that which the Father had always planned.

It is in all this that we discover our general identity—the identity to which the unique factor of our personal (particular) identities is added, so that we are aware of our whole identity, and with it, of our destiny. This is our marvellous identity in the new age—and it is knowing as we are known, and this, too, is our destiny. We repeat the good thought that in God’s reckoning and action all of this has taken place. We are *now* glorified, even if that statement has a proleptic note.

⁵ We may not think that Christ being elder brother to the brethren is something extraordinary, but it is, as is also the very fact of the brethren themselves. A reading of Hebrews 2:10–18 shows us the relational intimacy of Christ with his brethren, and their value in his eyes. It was only after the Resurrection that Christ called his disciples his brethren, and this ought to cause us to think. Brotherhood to Christ and sonship to the Father are the highest relational peaks we will ever reach.

THE PRESENT PROCESS OF MATURING, MOVING TO OUR DESTINY

First of all we need to remind ourselves of the whole context of this discussion of destiny. It puts into perspective the matters of authority, hierarchy and identity, as well as making its own text. None of these things can be seen as an entity in itself. We have just spoken of being proleptically glorified according to Romans 8:30. The *then* of the glorification is of grace, but it has a *now* of process. *Process* follows *crisis*, and process leads to *climax*. We have seen that the climax is conformity to the image of His Son, so that we will expect process to be the development of and into that image.

That is exactly how the New Testament expounds it. Hebrews 12:1–2 speaks of total concentration on Christ. Unimpeded by lesser things we are to look to him who is the initiator and completer of our faith. Again in Philippians 3:10–14 Paul speaks of participating in ‘the power of his resurrection’, and ‘the fellowship of his sufferings’, and ‘being conformed [*summophizomenos*] to the death of Christ’, so that ‘if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead’.⁶

II Corinthians 3:18 speaks of believers ‘with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord’, the outcome of which is a present progress in glorification—a being changed from one stage of glory to another. This is not

⁶ There is no suggestion in this passage that Paul would not rise from the dead if he did not ‘strain forward to what lies ahead’ (v. 13), but it is the *kind* of resurrection he will have which concerns him. Just as II Peter 1:11 speaks of ‘an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ’, so Paul wishes to have a fruitful outcome to his life and ministry. This can also be seen in I Corinthians 3:12–15.

merely a devotional looking at the Lord—although it is that also—but it is (as in Heb. 12:2) a dependency upon him; an imitation of him; and yet a full drawing upon the resources of Christ who dwells within.

To this point our language has been of the theological-devotional order, but it must not deceive us into thinking that concentration on Christ is only theological and devotional. It is actual participation in who he is, and in what he is doing. He is Lord of all principalities and authorities and powers and dominions, and he is putting down the evil ones amongst those celestial powers (I Cor. 15:24–28). He is winning the nations (Ps. 2:6ff.; Rev. 11:15; 19:15). He is liberating sinners from their guilt (Rev. 1:5; John 8:31–36). If we are to be *as* the conquering Son, then we must be *with* the conquering Christ. We cannot speak of being like him if our actions are simply imitatory. We must be *in* his action.

Growth in Conformity to Christ by Participation in His Action

The Son only did what the Father showed him or commanded him to do (cf. John 4:34; 5:19–20; 8:28; 10:17–18; 14:10, 30–31). The Father was working in the Son; the Son was participating in the Father’s will and plan. In Matthew 28:18–20 Christ gave the disciples the command to proclaim the gospel to the nations. He said he would be with them in this. In Acts 1:8 there was a similar statement, but this time he said the disciples would witness to him. In the Book of the Revelation the action of the church was known as involvement in ‘the word of God and the testimony of Jesus’ (1:2, 9; 6:9), or

'keeping the commandments of God and bearing testimony to Jesus' (12:17; cf. 14:12). In practice that meant that what Christ was doing in the world he was doing through his people. So, as they were *him* to the world, they grew in grace and developed in glorification.

The outcome of all this will be the ultimate triumph of Christ: the overcoming of the red dragon, the beast, the false prophet and Babylon. The pattern of Christ's ministry is seen in the Gospels: his compassion for people, his healings, exorcisms and releasing from guilt by forgiveness. All of this was sealed at the Cross, and is now the pattern⁷ for the church which is led by him. Only in sharing in the action of Christ do we develop from one stage of glory to another, and we do not point to our actions with pride.

Growth in Conformity to Christ by Participation in Holy Endeavour

Concentration upon Christ brings holiness of life and authentic living. Probably no better chapter than Colossians 3 covers this fact, and with it, too, Romans 6, Galatians 5 and Ephesians 4:26 to 5:32. It is not our intention here to expound those passages. In one sense II Peter 1:3–9 covers much of the Pauline teaching, and—for that matter—the teaching John has in his three Letters:

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to

⁷ By this we do not mean believers have to effect what he effected in the way he effected it. The *pattern* is not stereotyped. Christ works in many wonderful and different ways: so his people will work in those ways under his direction.

his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature. For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these things are yours and abound, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these things is blind and short-sighted and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

We note the steadfast application of the believer to these godly virtues. We also watch the habituation of them in his or her living. Being partakers of the divine nature⁸ means the indwelling of the three Persons in us, and us indwelling them, so that the life of virtue, faith, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection and love, naturally follows, though, of course, not without the determination of the will. By such means we 'grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ', and so we attain to 'the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' (Eph. 4:13–15).

All of these things, then—concentration on Christ, participation in Christ in his action and participation in Christ in his holiness—help to develop us so that we become fully in the image of Christ and are ready for the climax of destiny, that is, the climax of glory.

⁸ By this Peter does not mean we are divine—or ever will be—but that the divine resources are at our disposal, and we have fellowship with the Godhead (cf. I Cor. 1:9; I John 3:3; Col. 3:3).

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Inheritance

DESTINY AND INHERITANCE

The New Testament speaks of a ‘glorious inheritance’ and ‘an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled and unfading’. We can say that our destiny lies in this inheritance. Abraham was promised he would inherit the earth (Rom. 4:13), and Jesus said the meek will inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5), a statement which is almost a quote from Psalm 37:11: ‘But the meek shall possess the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity’.¹

Wonderful as these statements are, they seem somewhat unreal to most of us who are busily occupied with ‘the here and now’ of this planet. If we measure our destiny in terms of this life, then we will also measure inheritance in the same way. We will be tempted to

¹ The ‘meek’ in this land are those who wait on the Lord to judge the wicked and cut them off. Here ‘the land’ is Palestine, and not the whole earth. Jesus is making the principle universal. Note that ‘possess’ is the same as ‘inherit’. The idea is repeated in Psalm 37 five times—verses 9, 11, 22, 29, 34 (cf. Gen. 15:7, 8; 28:4; Lev. 20:4; Deut. 2:31; 16:20; Ps. 25:13; Isa. 54:3; 57:13).

rationalise the occupation of the early Christian with destiny and inheritance as a bit of a ‘There’ll be pie in the sky when you die, bye and bye’² philosophy.

Viktor Frankl’s ‘logotherapy’³ is a therapy based on the ideas of purpose and goals—something essential to human living. The ideas of destiny and inheritance as found in the Scriptures are a great incentive to live usefully in the light of hope. For our part we are still keeping in mind that authority is not a static and rigid system, but operates properly in love, in protection, correction and direction to those under it, and that all relationships are hierarchical in one way or another. Authority is linked with identity, and identity with destiny and inheritance.

In order to understand inheritance reasonably, we will need to backtrack to the times of the patriarchs and Israel as both related to God’s covenant with them.

SOMETHING OF INHERITANCE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Meanings of the Words for ‘Inheritance’ and ‘Inheriting’ in the Old and New Testaments

The Hebrew words for ‘inherit’ and ‘heritage’ or ‘inheritance’ are translated in modern versions by a

² This is, in fact, a verse of a hymn said to be sung from the Salvation Army hymn-book—especially in times of economic depression.

³ That is, ‘The therapy of meaning’. Two of his books are *The Doctor and the Soul* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1965) and *Man’s Search For Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1964). An excellent introduction to Frankl is Robert C. Leslie’s *Jesus and Logotherapy* (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1965).

number of words other than inherit, heritage, and inheritance. The word *yarash* (as in Lev. 20:24; Deut. 16:20)—‘to inherit’—is translated ‘possess’, ‘occupy’, and the noun by ‘possession’ and ‘heir’. The verb *nachal* (as in Exod. 32:13; Num. 26:25; Jer. 12:14) is also translated ‘to possess’, whilst for the noun *nachala* words such as ‘patrimony’ are used. One word which is not used often is *segullah*, where, in Exodus 19:5, it is ‘possession’ (RSV) and ‘peculiar treasure’ (AV). In the New Testament Greek the verb ‘to inherit’ is *kleronomeo* (Matt. 5:5; Mark 10:17; I Cor. 6:9; etc.), and is ‘to be heir’, or ‘to inherit’, with modern translations of ‘gain’, ‘win’, ‘claim’. The noun *kleronomos* means ‘heir’, and the word *kleronomia* means ‘inheritance’, sometimes translated ‘property’, and ‘share’. Other Greek words are used, but for our purposes the words are fairly clear in their meaning.

OLD TESTAMENT UNDERSTANDINGS OF HERITAGE

Israel Is the Heritage of the Lord

Statements like ‘thy heritage’, ‘his heritage’, ‘the heritage of the Lord’, ‘the heritage of God’ abound, as also God speaks of ‘my heritage’, there being over thirty of these in the Old Testament. What God gives to His heritage, and what He does for them, as well as against them—when they sin grievously—is quite a story. What does it mean, then, that Israel is God’s heritage? Exodus 19:5 gives some idea in that Israel is God’s ‘own possession’. That which one inherits is

one’s own possession. Hebrews 1:2 says that God appointed His Son ‘heir of all things’. Again, the Son is the possessor. The land of Israel was God’s land, and so they were His people. This was sovereign protection for them. A reading of the verses pertaining to God having His heritage as Israel tells us how God acted towards, against and on behalf of His inheritance.

God Gave the Land of Palestine to Abraham, and the Descendants of Abraham, as an Inheritance

In Genesis 12:7 God told Abraham, ‘To your descendants I will give this land’. In Exodus 6:8 God told Moses, ‘I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession’. At the same time the land belonged to God—His possession—even though He allotted it for an inheritance to the people. Joshua was the one chosen to allot⁴ the land to the different tribes⁵—with the exception of Levi (Ezek. 44:28).

The inheritance was subject to conditions which meant that (i) the land belonged to God in perpetuity, and (ii) under God it belonged to the tribe or family in perpetuity. If for some economic or other reason the lot was sold, the sale was only temporary. In the year of Jubilee it had to be returned (Lev. 25:25–34). A father’s

⁴ Literally the land was given by drawing lots—hence ‘allotments’. The term ‘lot’ (*goral*) was used in conjunction with inheritance, because it was the means by which the land was allotted.

⁵ Joshua set the situation for all families, but in Ezekiel 47:13ff. (cf. 36:12) it was said that the land would be resettled and re-allotted when the nation returned from exile.

possession was to be passed on to his family (Lev. 27:14–25; Prov. 13:22), the elder son receiving ‘a double portion’. Strict rules governed inheritance, the sons being first in the line of inheritance, and the daughters if there were no sons. The story of Naboth’s vineyard shows how strict were the rules of inheritance. Ahab wanted Naboth’s land, but Naboth could not sell it even if he had wished to do so. The judgment on Jezebel and Ahab was a terrible one. Daughters were not permitted to marry outside their tribe for fear of the land passing to another tribe.

The Widening View of Inheritance

In Psalm 105:8–11 the Psalmist takes heart from the covenant promise of God regarding the inheritance of Israel—the land given to them. In Isaiah 54:3 Israel is told:

You will spread abroad to the right and to the left,
and your descendants will possess [inherit] the nations
and will people the desolate cities.

This prophecy comports with Isaiah 14:1–3, where it is promised that God will restore Israel to its own and cause others to join them (cf. Isa. 2:1–4; Micah 4:1–3) and they will be *possessed* by Israel, that is, Israel will inherit these nations. All the nations, of course, belong to God, but He widens Israel’s inheritance in accordance with His promise to Jacob in Genesis 28:13–14. This makes most important the promise to the Messiah–Son in Psalm 2, where the nations have set themselves against God and His

Messiah. Verses 6–8 are important because the Son–Messiah–King is told (i) ‘you are my son’, and (ii) ‘Ask of me, and I will make the nations your *heritage* and the ends of the earth your *possession*’.

SOMETHING OF INHERITANCE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Son of God and His Inheritance

The statement at Jesus’ baptism, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’, must be taken to refer to inheritance.⁶ We have seen that the whole earth is God’s, that is, His possession. The Divine baptismal statement is equivalent to declaring Jesus to be ‘the Son of God in power’ (cf. Rom. 1:4) and asserting that the nations are his inheritance. This is the key to Acts 1:8, where the disciples are told to be witnesses to the Son to all the nations, that is, ‘the end of the earth’, which are, of course, Christ’s inheritance.

The theme is seen in the story of the owner of the vineyard who sent first his servants and later his son to receive what was due from the tenants to whom he had rented the vineyard. The tenants beat some of the servants and killed others, but when the son came they said, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours’.⁷ This was tantamount to

⁶ Declaration of sonship is the thought behind ‘adoption’ in the NT. See Galatians 4:1–7.

⁷ The story is found in Matthew 21:33–41, Mark 12:1–12, and Luke 20:9–19. The servants are the prophets, and the son is the Son of God. It appears to be directed against the chief priests, the scribes and the elders. They certainly get the point and are greatly disturbed.

defying the law of God in regard to inheritance and the heir—the Messiah of Psalm 2.

Again the accounts of adoption in Galatians 4:1–7 and Romans 8:14–17 may at first sight seem to have ‘sonship’ as their goal, but in fact it is being heirs that is the prominent point. They are not only sons, but also heirs. In Romans 8:17 (cf. Gal. 4:6–7), (i) they are ‘heirs of God’, that is, they inherit God! This is seen in Psalm 16:5–6, ‘The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; thou holdest my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage’;⁸ and (ii) they are ‘co-heirs with Christ’,⁹ that is, they share with the Son his *possession* of the nations, which, in turn, relates to the eschatological glory. God allots the nations to him: there is nothing anyone can do about that. As we will see in Revelation 21:7, the one who is a conqueror is counted as a son of God and receives the heritage, that is, ‘the new heavens, and the new earth’!

The Inheritance of the Sons of God

We look firstly at the *fact* of the inheritance. In Ephesians Paul seems to think it necessary to remind his readers of the inheritance and its wonder. In 1:15–19 he

⁸ Here the psalmist sees God as his heritage and yet as a heritage given him by God, and the experience of this is deeply satisfying. This comports with Psalm 73:25–26, ‘Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever’. Again in Lamentations 3:24 is the same idea: ‘“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him”’.

⁹ The Son is the heir, but all in him are ‘co-heirs’ or ‘joint-heirs’.

prays the Father of glory to so work in his readers that they ‘may know what is the hope to which he has called you’, and ‘what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints’. Thus we see inheritance is rated highly. See likewise the statement of I Peter 1:3–5:

By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

This must be related to ‘the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ’(I Pet. 1:13).

What, then, is this inheritance? We have already seen the inheritance of the sons of God is *God* (Rom. 8:17; cf. 5:1). *Linked with the idea of God is the idea of His glory*. To inherit the glory of God is surely to become glorious *like* Him, though not *as* Him. In John 17:5 Jesus speaks of ‘the glory which I had with thee before the world was made’, and in 17:24 he desires of the Father ‘that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory’¹⁰ which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world’. We saw in Psalm 16:5–6 that God is the psalmist’s ‘goodly heritage’. He concludes his Psalm with, ‘Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fulness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore’.

¹⁰ It is doubtful that Jesus merely wishes his disciples to be spectators of his glory. Rather he wishes them to be partakers of it. In John 17:22 he speaks of having given them his glory—‘that they may be one even as we are one’. In terms of John 3:3—and perhaps II Corinthians 3:8 (cf. Heb. 12:2)—Jesus knows that to look at his glory is for them to be fully glorified—‘When we shall see him we shall be like him’.

This would seem to comport with Paul's statement of I Corinthians 2:7–10:

But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification . . . as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him,' God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

This tells us the glorification of God's people is so rich and wonderful as to be beyond any earthly comparison. Paul speaks in the same glowing terms as Peter in his First Letter (1:2–4, 13). So Paul in Philippians 3:21 looks for the human body of humiliation to 'be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself'.

It is here that our ideas of identity, destiny, vocation and inheritance begin to merge and become dynamically *one*. If we pursue the glorification theme as part of the inheritance schema, then we see from Romans 8:29 that we are being conformed to the image of God's Son. In I John 3:1–3 our being children of God means we will be *like* Him—a parallel statement to Romans 8:29. If we go beyond the fact to the reality, then we begin to understand 'his glorious inheritance in the saints' (Eph. 1:18). Commentators debate as to whether the glorious inheritance in the saints is *God's* inheritance as Israel was in the Old Testament, or whether the saints inherit the glory of God, as we understand in Romans 8:17. Perhaps the debate cannot be resolved other than by saying it is *both*. We cannot inherit God's glory without becoming a glorious people, and His inheritance.

This, then, is again intricately linked with Exodus 19:5–6, where Israel is 'my own *possession* among all peoples' and is to God 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' under Him. *Possession* here is *segullah*, a term of heritage. When this passage is linked with I Peter 2:9–10 (as Peter undoubtedly understood it to be), then the people of Pentecost—the *new* people¹¹ of God—are salvifically 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people', for once they 'were no people but now are God's people', that is, have become His inheritance and inheritors of Him, of His promises—and so on.

In regard to inheritance we read further that the people of God shall:

- (a) inherit eternal life (Matt. 19:29; cf. 10:17–22);
- (b) inherit the promises (Heb. 6:12; 11:9; cf. 12:17);
- (c) inherit the Kingdom of God (Matt. 25:34; I Cor. 6:9–10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; cf. Matt. 7:21–23; I Cor. 15:50). Although these references say that those who do evil shall not inherit the Kingdom, they imply that others shall;
- (d) be 'inheritors of the saints in light', that is, be those who are sanctified (Col. 1:12; Acts 20:32; cf. 26:18), meaning that *we shall inherit light* (cf. *JB*). *NEB* has 'share the heritage of God's people in the realm of light'.

¹¹ When we say *new* we do not mean *different*. The church has continuity with Israel since it was initially composed only of Jews, but it also has discontinuity since the Sanhedrin rejected its claim to be the Messianic people.

If, then, we bring together the other elements of which we have spoken (above), we—being sons—shall:

- (e) inherit glory (Rom. 5:2; 8:17, 29–30; cf. I Cor. 2:6f.; II Cor. 4:16–18)—sharing the glory of God and being glorified (Phil. 3:21);
- (f) inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5, 10; Rom. 4:13);
- (g) inherit the nations (Ps. 2:6–8; Acts 1:8).

At the same time we will know that God is our inheritance and we are His and He has sealed us for our inheritance (Eph. 1:14; 4:30), and that we are now—proleptically—glorified, that is, are already inheritors of that which is to come. Being inheritors, we shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 25:34, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’), yet we are already in that Kingdom (Col. 1:12–13).

THE WHOLE MATTER OF THE INHERITANCE

The material we have shared above is tightly packed together, and not fully related, so we shall now endeavour to ‘unpack’ it, that is, set it out simply and clearly and also show the interrelatedness of its components. It should go something like this:

God’s possession of all creation—His right as Creator—means all things are His. Man possesses only what he is given, and then is responsible for it. By the Fall, Man loses much that he had—true life, joy, peace, love, full relationship with God, fellow-humans and creation.

God is the true and perfect Giver, hence His gifts are good (James 1:17). In the covenant with Abraham He promises to that person and his descendants the land of Palestine as an inheritance. He is their heritage and they are His—along with the land. In time this heritage is extended to cover all the nations of the earth, that is, all nations are God’s but He will include them under His covenant with Israel. The true Heir appears—the Messiah—King—Son of Psalm 2—and to him are promised all the nations as his inheritance. Under the New Covenant the inheritance is now to be eternal (Heb. 9:15), so that the promises now relate to eternal things, which, anyway, was how the patriarchs had seen them (Heb. 11:8–10); that is, they expected to inherit an eternal city and have an eternal inheritance.

Under Christ the inheritance is one of glory, is one of inheriting the earth¹²—the world, creation—and this is to take the form of the new people of God being glorified ultimately, inheriting the Kingdom of God as theirs, and so becoming a new people, ‘a Kingdom of priests’ unto their God, and so reigning on the earth for ever. They are already in the Kingdom in this life (Col. 1:13), and already they reign (Rom. 5:17; Eph. 2:5–6; cf. Rev. 2:26–27; 3:21), and yet will ultimately inherit the Kingdom and reign in glory, exercising a royal

¹² John Murray in his *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1977, p. 142) comments on Romans 4:13:

In the light of Pauline teaching as a whole, however, we cannot exclude from the scope of this promise, as defined by the apostle, the most inclusive messianic purport. It is defined as the promise to Abraham that *he* should be heir of the world, but it is also a promise to his seed and, therefore, can hardly involve anything less than the world-wide dominion promised to Christ and to the spiritual seed of Abraham in him. It is a promise that receives its ultimate fulfilment in the consummated order of the new heavens and the new earth.

priestly ministry both to God and the creation, with all its creatures both terrestrial and celestial. All the nations will have come to them as their inheritance, and even the new heavens and the new earth will be their inheritance. All of this makes sense in the light of the whole Scriptures. Even so, we need to clarify two thoughts: (i) that the people of God are His *segullah*, His glorious inheritance, and (ii) what it means for His people to inherit Him—to share in His glory (Rom. 5:1; 8:17).

INHERITING GOD: GOD INHERITING US

To inherit is to possess, to own, to have for one's own enjoyment, with—of course—responsibility for the best use of what has been given. Just as in Israel all things belonged to God but all things were given freely—covenantally—to Israel, so all things have been given to us—*all things*. In I Corinthians 3:1–4 Paul complained that some Corinthians were living '*as carnal*'. Their fleshliness—and spiritual dullness—took the form of party-spirit and party-action. They sought to limit themselves to one leader—Paul, Peter, Apollos, and so on. Paul then gave them teaching about the functions that we all have; for example, ploughing, sowing, nurturing and reaping. Finally he cried:

Let no one boast of men. For *all things are yours*, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, *all are yours*; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

Here we are confronted by numerous things. There is nothing that does not belong to us—nothing! All is ours! All things are ours. We possess them. They are

our heritage. But are they ours to squander as the prodigal son squandered his inheritance? Are they there for us to enjoy since 'He gives us all things richly to enjoy', and withholds nothing? 'He who withheld not his only Son but abandoned him up for us all, will he not *with him* freely give us *all things*?'. The 'all things' are not only good, but they are functional, they are useful, they are effective.

Now we can see where authority, hierarchy, vocation, identity, destiny and inheritance all meet. They meet in 'you are Christ's; and Christ is God's'. When we know our 'life is hid with Christ in God', then we know the wonder and the power of the Persons indwelling us, and us indwelling the Persons. We know the hierarchy of love—that powerful love-entity of relational being, and vocational operations. We know that our destiny is bound up in this hierarchy; in this wise counsel of God; in this plan of uniting all things in Christ by reconciling them, filling them up, bringing them under the obedience of Christ, and giving them true sway in authentic freedom.

This has been God's purpose in history: to mature us through grace and love, building us up to be a royalty of priesthood, so that we might 'with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven laud and magnify His glorious Name', worship Him and enjoy Him for ever. This cannot be done on humanitarian, egalitarian and autonomous bases. We will resent 'angels and archangels, elders and living creatures'; we will be uneasy where hierarchy is and wish to form our own. Simplicity and humility will baffle us and we will want to establish our own wisdom and our own systems and cities. The Holy City will be too confronting.

Yet such need not be. Oneness with God, participation in the Divine Unity, and worship within the creation under true priestly leadership, need bring nothing to human beings but freedom, intense joy, wonder and wisdom.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Essay on Consummation

INTRODUCTION TO OUR ESSAY—THE CONSUMMATION OF THE AGE

In Matthew 28:18–20 Jesus gave the mandate of proclaiming the Gospel in all the world, in order to win the nations, and make his inheritance complete in accordance with Psalm 2:6–8. In effect he said, ‘Whilst you are carrying out this task I will be with you right up to the consummation of the age (*tes sunteleias tou aionos*)’. Of course this was not a new idea to Jewish thinking. The Old Testament had its teaching of ‘the day of the Lord’ couched in varying descriptive language. The day of the Lord would usher in a new era for Yahweh and His people, and indeed for all nations. Zechariah 14:9 said, ‘And the Lord will become king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be one and his name one’. Many of the prophets spoke of ‘that day’, some seeing it as the time of judgment for Israel (cf. Isa. 2:12ff.; Ezek. 13:5; Joel 1:15; 2:1; Zeph. 1:7, 14; Zech. 14:1)—after which would come full restoration of the nation—and some saw it as a judgment of the

nations (Isa. 13:6ff.; Jer. 46:10; Obad. 15; Joel 2:31).

In the New Testament the day of the Lord is a strong theme. It is variously called 'the day of wrath'; 'that day when . . . God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus'; 'the day of visitation'; 'the day of Christ'; 'the day of the Lord'; 'the day of redemption'; and 'that day'. In Acts 3:19–21 Peter spoke of a coming 'restitution of all things'. It was to be a wonderful time:

Repent, therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old.

Jesus often spoke of the coming of the Son of Man, that is, of his own coming, and it was to be a thing of glory. The day of the Lord in I Thessalonians 4:13–18 (cf. I Cor. 15:51ff.; Phil. 3:21) was to be a time of great joy and glorious transformation. In II Peter 3:8–14 the present heavens and earth would be subjected to a purifying holocaust, whilst in Revelation 21:1–5 they simply 'pass away' and are replaced by new heavens and a new earth.

The time between 'now' and 'then' is detailed in I Corinthians 15:24–28. This is the time Christ is working with his people to put down all their enemies—the enemies of God—and present the Kingdom to the Father, 'that God may be all in all', and every tongue may 'confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father'. Everything is leading up to the consummation of this present age so that 'the age to come' will come—that is, the glorious new age. This will be the consummation.

In the eschatologies of some religions there is something approaching the idea of a 'new age'. In the polyglot ideas of our own decade—those born of a mixture of Eastern religions and undigested 'Christian' thinking—there is much talk of 'the new age'. It is a conglomeration of charismatic,¹ pneumatic, occultic, religious, psychological and sociological ideas. The true new age is the age of Christ, for he is Lord over it (Eph. 1:21).

In our last chapter we spoke something of what will be in that new age, mainly in terms of inheritance, for inheritance really covers all that shall be since God's redeemed children will inherit Him, and will possess 'all things'. It is these things, these elements and these matters which I would now like to present in more essay form.

* * *

One of the problems of this essay is to put together statements which are factual but often not literal, prophecies which are actual but which are also written in prophetic language and imagery. Writing which is apocalyptic ought not to be understood literalistically, but the truth it seeks to convey is actual. Whilst—by nature of the case—there can be no literal 'bottomless pit', yet

¹ Using the term 'charismatic' is not to demean the NT use of it, that is, a ministry given gift-wise so that God's people can do things which do not arise from their *essential* beings which have other natural gifts. Things called 'charismatic, pneumatic and occultic' are those which arise not from Man's essential (i.e. created) being, but by an endowment which is sometimes called 'supernatural'. All of these things are to be tested out as to whether they meet the criteria of true inspiration from God. Holiness and the fruit of the Spirit are some of these biblical criteria, and there are more.

human thinking comprehends what it means. Again, the Scriptures have their own forms of expression: they use images which are understood and which are helpful. Some language may be figurative, but the figures are of realities which can be comprehended. We can say there is a biblical way of talking which is comprehensible. For example, the Scriptures speak of a 'holy city', or 'a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God'. We all understand what a city is, and we can understand the *idea* of 'the holy city' as found in the Book of the Revelation, but we do not have to think in terms of a literal city, but yet in terms of an actual city. That is, the principle of 'city'—both 'holy' and 'unholy'—is known to us. When, then, in this essay, we take the images and figures and talk as though they were literal, we do not mean 'literal' but 'actual'. We might even speak of 'the archetypal city' whose 'principle of being' is shown in the ectypal city which may be a literal city. Stating these things in this part of the essay makes it possible—and permissible—for us to use images, figures and even literal things and events without the charge of being hopelessly simplistic and incredibly confused. Having said this, we can now proceed to look at the various elements of the inheritance or destiny which come to the faithful.

* * *

What an event it will be to see the new heavens and the new earth come into being! Will they be as they are now but renewed, renovated, reprimed? Will we see glories which Paul said eye has never seen, ear has never heard, and mind has never imagined? The redeemed

will be citizens of this world, yet also citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20). Will there be commuting between two worlds—the terrestrial and the celestial—or will they be one? When Paul spoke of the inward groaning of all creatures to be freed from 'the bondage of corruption', he was speaking about a present temporal state when we are confronted with our mortality and the decay of created things. He spoke of 'this body of humiliation', meaning that Man—created by God—was humiliated by the mortality of his flesh and the prospect of the grave. In the new age there will be none of this; everything will be—to coin a word—'eternalised'. It will be granted the gift of immortality. How well does C. S. Lewis speak of eternalised things in his book *The Great Divorce*?² Another way of saying this is that all things will be reality, that is, as ontological. For this reason what we call 'existential guilt' will no longer be present.

The exhilaration of the human spirit will know no bounds. Because forgiveness has been experienced as total and because—eschatologically—justification has been voiced (cf. Gal. 5:5), the glorified human spirit will know only love, joy and peace—virtues which here are always incomplete.

So much, then, for the glories of the new heavens and the new earth. These will be our heritage. But heritage demands responsibility for the privilege and authority given. Will we people the millions of planets and systems we inherit? What of our Lord's rewards of being over one city, five cities, ten cities? Is there authority of this kind in the age to come? Are there

² C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, Macmillan, New York, 1968.

‘chiefs’ and ‘indians’ and, if so, is there a system which is hierarchical—a course of relational authorities which do not speak of nature but of function, and which obviate the need for a celestial democracy? Will all creatures be homogenized so that no differences of nature are observed and all essential being is monochrome, or will there be a glorious display of diversity, differentiations and capacities which will never cease to send a thrill through the heavens and the earth, never cease to delineate the many-faceted, many-splendoured glory of God and Man?

To be glorified—what will that mean? Will it mean not only immortality but also a personal beauty of each creature that is ravishing and which contains and explicates the identity of each? Will not this glory fully set forth the glory of God, and ensure the utter unity of the whole creation, and give us rich knowledge and experience of the fullness of authentic relationships (cf. John 17:22), and this especially as we view the unity, love and fellowship of the Triune Godhead, the intimacy of the three Persons of that Godhead?

What will it be to live wholly as ‘Family’, God being ‘the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named’—that is, receives its reality, derives its family being, has its Fatherly head, and is wholly family, having nothing figurative about it?³ To know what is ontologically indispensable—actual Fatherhood—will be to know authentic Familyhood, something

³ Some see God’s Fatherhood—and therefore our familyhood—as figurative. This is less than personal and fulfilling sonship for human creatures. The ontological reality will surely shine forth as actual, and permit us to enter the mystery of the Godhead, of the Divine Being.

which the world of our age desperately needs to experience.

What, then, will it be to experience the rich life of the holy city which is at once the Bride of the Son, the Wife of the Father, and the Mother of us all? This is the city in which dwells only righteousness, and the contamination and corruption of sin and lust are past events. The city is filled with light and can never know darkness, God and the Lamb being its light. Now that light will be actual but not merely literal. The light which ‘lightens every man’, and which is the life of the Logos and so the ‘light of man’ (John 1:4), will be moral and spiritual and personal and, so, powerful. No wonder Paul said all such is beyond our present comprehension, though not beyond God’s revelation to us (I Cor. 2:10).

What will it mean that the kings of the nations will bring their glory into the holy city? Will it be that the cultural treasures of the many peoples will not be lost even in eternity, and that present endeavour will have eternal fruit? We do not now rightly know, but we will know, even as we are known. We have good intimations of what the river of life means—for ‘there is a river whose streams make glad the city of God’. The tree of life—which many call ‘Calvary’s tree’—will always yield the fruits the glorified creatures will enjoy. The waters that flow from the throne will be the Divine blessings given to all creatures. The joy and peace and love of the holy city will ensure there will never be pain, for that has given way to abundant health; there will be no tears—except they be of joy and delight; there will be no death, for all is life, and the sun will smite no one by day, nor the moon by

night, and the Lamb will lead his people beside living waters.

And so we could go on, seemingly endlessly. None of what we have discussed is really speculation. The modes and the manners of what will be may be speculative, but the reality is beyond speculation. Only one thing remains for this essayist to put forth, and that is a question about the meaning of 'a royal priesthood'.⁴ Part of the answer lies in Exodus 19:5–6 and I Peter 2:9–10; that is, that the priesthood is there to show the holiness of God, which in the history of Man is the real triumph of God.⁵ It is also to 'declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light'. The teaching on the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek injects even more meaning to the term 'a royal priesthood', for Melchizedek—and so Christ—is a Priest–King. The order of a royal priesthood is to reign and, as well, to offer 'spiritual sacrifices',⁶ which makes sense of 'kings and priests *unto* God'. The *unto* is significant in that God desires worship and service from all His people. John 4:20–24 gives us some *rationale* of worship, since worship and service are the one.⁷ Revelation 5:10 makes it clear that

⁴ See I Peter 2:4–10; Revelation 1:5–6; 5:10; 20:4; cf. 22:5.

⁵ Man is destined to become holy (Eph. 1:4; I Pet. 1:2) and must be so in order to see God (Matt. 5:8; Heb. 12:14), having been called in and into holiness (I Thess. 4:3–7; Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:2; 6:11; Heb. 9:14), and having been cleansed in order to be holy. This is the supreme triumph of history.

⁶ These sacrifices are those of praise and proper deeds (I Pet. 2:5; Heb. 13:15–16), and 'proper deeds' will undoubtedly be the order of the new age, which will not be static but dynamic, not 'laid back' but ever doing the revealed will of God.

⁷ See my *The Way and Wonder of Worship* (NCPI, 1990), where the matter of worship and service are shown to be one.

all those whom God has redeemed constitute this royal priesthood, and states 'and they shall reign on earth', and Revelation 22:5 says 'they shall reign for ever'.

This brings us to the fact that, if believers are to judge angels (cf. I Cor. 6:2; cf. Ps. 8:5–8; 82:1–7), then, in the terrestrial–celestial hierarchy, glorified humanity is high in the order. If egalitarian principles have always constrained some of the glorified, then only a revelation will liberate them from this form of thinking. If we are to inherit the new heavens and the new earth—that is, they are to be our *possession* and our *allotment*—then we will have to lose humanitarian–egalitarian concepts and learn—even *now*—to understand the mystery of authority, of hierarchy, of vocation, of identity, of destiny and of inheritance. It is when we understand the harmonious, functional *whole* of these that we can be apt candidates for the future that is ours. All of this—as we have said many times—must be in the understanding that 'our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ'; that 'we have been called into the fellowship of his Son'; that 'our lives are hid with Christ in God'; and that 'we are partakers of the divine nature'. This is how things are now for us, but the measure of them will be far beyond our present understanding. True, we now only know in part, but then we shall know in full: we shall know even as we are known.

None of this can happen except we be inducted into the mystery of the Divine Being, unless we are conducted into the fellowship of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, and know—beyond all doubt—'the liberty of the glory of the sons of God'.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Essay on 'All Things Are Yours in the Present Time'

POSSESSING ONE'S POSSESSIONS

In the Pentateuch the people of the covenant—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—are given promises, time and again, regarding the land of Canaan. God tells the patriarchs He will give them this land 'for your possession'. Theirs are the true 'land rights'. We know the Canaanites were to be dispossessed because of their iniquity, especially their idolatry. What matters for our present essay is that whilst the patriarchs were promised possession they had to effect it. This was to be a matter of obedience and faith. In the early stages of their journey they failed to go up and take the land because the obstacles seemed too large and frightening. Faith and obedience were missing. When chastised because of this, the heady ones decided to go and take the land anyway. They failed because they sought victory in their own strength.

It took some forty years to train Israel to go up and possess its possessions. The words 'possession' and 'possess' are used some 140 times in the first six books (Genesis to Joshua). The idea of being given possessions and then possessing those possessions was certainly dinned into the people of God—Israel.

We have seen that, in the New Covenant mediated by Christ, certain promises are made, and certain gifts are given, but these must all be appropriated by obedience and faith. Christ comes as Messiah in the Gospels, and his hearers not only have the right to believe he will effect good things such as healing, signs and miracles, but in fact they are also supposed to understand these 'good things'. Many do. Here and there there is unbelief, but Christ is able to say to some, 'Go in peace. Your faith has saved you', or, 'Go in peace, your faith has healed you'. In these special cases faith—belief in Jesus—brought healing to them. They were 'possessing their possessions' in Christ. In John's Gospel to believe in Jesus is to receive eternal life. The Acts evidence the gifts of God being worked through His servants, and in the Epistles the church is informed—time and again—of the many gifts of God.¹ Faith is demanded for believing God's goodness in giving, and for conscious appropriation of the gifts—the possessing of the possessions.

What is so thrilling to the Christian is that he—or she—has been given gifts, and such gifts both quantitatively and qualitatively, so that the receiver has more than is required for true living, and for useful ministry.

¹ See my 'The Giver: The Gifts: The Giving', which is no. 3 of the *Living Faith Studies* (NCPI, 1979, vol. 1).

We have made much in this book of the fact that there is a great treasure or inheritance stored up for us, and it may be that in rightly setting our sights upon it we may nevertheless neglect and underestimate the gifts we already possess. Faith is no less required in seeing and possessing these in the present life than it is in being 'the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen' (Heb. 11:1).

'THANKS BE TO GOD FOR HIS INEXPRESSIBLE GIFT!'

This is one of the appreciative cries of the human heart which has had grace lavished upon it by the loving Triune God (II Cor. 9:15).² In this case it is the Father's gift of His Son. As Paul tells us elsewhere, 'He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all' is the One who will 'give us all things with him'. General statements like 'God . . . richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy', 'everything created by God is good', 'the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food', indicate that creation is filled with the beautiful riches of God. Genesis 1:31 confirms this: 'And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good'. Many of the

² Matthew 5:43–48 makes it clear that God pours out His gifts lavishly upon all human creatures—whether they do good or evil. In our case we are speaking of one who recognises the grace of God and receives it with gratitude. In II Corinthians 6:1 Paul warns his readers against accepting the grace of God in vain, that is, 'in an empty way'. Paul's Letter to the Galatians extrapolates this point.

Psalms (cf. Ps. 104) are filled with praise for God's goodness in creation, in preservation of His people and the world, as also for His strong covenantal love.

We know that deep trouble came to Man and creation when Man refused to be grateful and to honour God for all that He was, and all He had done (Rom. 1:21). Many Scriptures exhort God's people to give praise and thanksgiving to God for who He is and what He has done, and does. Idolatry is Man's substitute for God, as the devotee ascribes all glory and power to that object. There will never be thanksgiving to God whilst Man insists he receives nothing from God. Human egotism and idolatry go hand in hand. Certainly if Man will not acknowledge the gifts of God in creation, he will not acknowledge them in redemption.³

For the moment we will not consider this terrible rejection of God by Man, and the lie of worship which is idolatrous. We will concentrate on the wonder of covenant as first it came to Noah; then to the patriarchs; and in power to the people of Israel. Much as that is a great wonder in itself, the coming of the New Covenant confronts us now in our present age with the immeasurable giving of God. Such covenant contains God's 'inexpressible gift'. In fact our present book has sought to reveal the rich grace of God in all His creating and saving acts. Nothing can transcend Paul's statement of

³ We know that fallen Man cannot afford to see the goodness of God in creation. Thus he does not first see God's goodness in creation. The act of the Gospel and the Spirit in redemption brings a person to see that God is love, so that knowing this he then sees God's gifts in redemption and creation. In both Acts 14 and 17 Paul endeavours to show the pagans the active goodness in creation, but this is more an *apologia* than a *kerugma* in itself.

II Corinthians 8:9, 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich'.

If we were tempted to think that God in His greatness finds giving a mere trifle, and no drain upon His resources, then the gift of His Son at the Cross must tell us of the costliness of giving. Even so, this is a poor way of considering God's giving. It is the glory of Himself that He gives—without conditions—and it should be the glory of Man that he receives without quibbling and without taking all for granted.

THE FACT OF THE PRESENT GIFTS IN THE CHURCH

Much of the Epistles is given over to the matter of gifts. It is not our intention to cover all these, but rather to indicate the reality and significance of them. The gifts seem to be of two kinds, the first being those of grace, such as the elements which are linked with redemption—faith, repentance, the forgiveness of sins, new birth, new (eternal) life, justification, sanctification, adoption (sonship), the Holy Spirit, and proleptic glorification.⁴ All of these gifts are found and operate in the context of faith, hope, and love. In Ephesians 1:3 we have the positive statement that the heavenly Father 'has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly

⁴ By 'proleptic glorification' we mean that spoken of in Romans 8:30. Whilst we are being glorified (II Cor. 3:18; cf. 4:16–18), yet God has accepted the outcome as applying to us now. This assured glorification is a gift.

places', and these blessings are nominated as those of holiness and sonship which come through redemption via the forgiveness of sins. Not all the blessings are nominated, but the sense of the passage is that there is no blessing (gift) which has been withheld. We have *all* gifts.

The second set of gifts (in Eph. 4:7ff.) are those which we might call 'churchly' or ecclesial, such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. In I Corinthians 12:4–31 (cf. I Cor. 14:1ff.) there are gifts which become known as 'the charismata'. In I Peter 4:10f. it would seem that the gifts of Ephesians 4 and I Corinthians 12 are much in mind. These ecclesial gifts appear to have two functions:

- (a) to be of use within the church to strengthen and enrich it, and
- (b) to be of value in the proclamation of the gospel.

Romans 12:3–13 is a fine commentary on the facts and uses of these gifts. It is clear from Ephesians 4:7–15 that all members of the community are involved in ministry, that is, in being servants one of another, and that gifts are a great help in this service.

It is clear that all gifts are of grace, and even of mercy (Rom. 12:3, 6; I Cor. 15:10; II Cor. 4:1; Gal. 1:15–16; Eph. 3:7–9; I Tim. 1:16; I Pet. 4:10–11), and their power lies in the fact that they are directly given by God to His children. As in Romans 6:23 the gift of God is eternal life 'in Christ Jesus', so the gifts of Christ *are* Christ (Eph. 4:7f.), and are the gifts of the Spirit inasmuch as the Spirit distributes them sovereignly (I Cor. 12:7, 11).

THE ESSENCE OF TRUE GIVING

James 1:17–18 (with 1:5 and 3:17) tells us that there is no good giving and no perfect gift which does not come from the Father. He is the true Giver. All human giving is flawed. We—being evil—may know how to give good gifts to our children, but even there we do not do it perfectly. Giving is perhaps the most difficult exercise of all human action.

At the same time, for the believer *not* to give is a stultifying exercise. He—or she—is, by redemption, an hilarious giver (II Cor. 9:7). The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost shows the new giving. Love was shown in giving, for this is the principle of love—to give. ‘God so loved . . . that he gave . . .’ is the song of the New Testament, but is the song also of the Old Testament. Israel knew it should care for the poor, for widows, orphans and the indigent. Such giving followed the paradigm of the Covenant-Father who saved Israel and gave her the Promised Land. Such giving was to be found in the sacrifices, for these were given by God (Lev. 17:11).

In the light of what we have spoken about hierarchies of love, and of the *perichoresis*, that is, the internal circulatory movement of the Divine Hierarchy, it was natural that when the Spirit came he brought the love of God into the hearts of all (Rom. 5:5), and so true giving of perfect gifts⁵ suddenly became operative.

⁵ We mean by this what John means in I John 3:10–22. There the *needed* gift is the *perfect* gift; that is, the giving of the Son for forgiveness (v. 16) and the giving of the gift to meet the need of the brother (vv. 17–18). We mean nothing more or less than the gift which meets the need when we have the wherewithal to supply it.

The Acts and the Epistles inform us of this perpetual action.

GIVING AND THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving throughout the Scripture is something which—like love—is commanded. Most sacrificial offerings are made in thanksgiving, even if many of them are propitiatory, since it is God who gives the sacrifice (Lev. 17:11) which initiates and sustains faith in the offerer who is grateful for grace (cf. Luke 18:13–14; Rom. 3:24–25; I John 4:9–10). Romans 9:4–5 speaks of the gifts which were given to Israel—‘the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises’—and these, of course, were also given to the people of the New Covenant. Psalm 136 bases the response of thanksgiving on the steadfast love of the Lord which endures for ever. Human beings ought always to be grateful, especially for the gifts which give life and sustain it. In the New Testament there are many injunctions to give thanks to God—especially to God the Father—for the gift of eternal life in Christ, for food, for clothing, and indeed for *all things* and in *all circumstances*.

When we say thanksgiving is commanded, we do not mean that it is a difficult exercise. Seeing all the nature of God, thanksgiving is something which emerges from us in an involuntary way. This is more so because we are ever receiving from God: the natural response is to be grateful. Paul says, ‘What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?’, and that shows we are those who continually receive from God.

RECEIVING, THANKSGIVING AND GIVING

The apostles kept in mind the saying of Jesus, ‘It is more

blessed to give than to receive'. Jesus taught much on this score, but the main point is that we are not simply to be receivers. We are to be receivers in order to give. This is so clearly expounded in II Corinthians chapters 8 and 9. The joy of giving is high, but the cost of retaining all things for ourselves is the loss of the richest of joy. What we are trying to say in this closing essay is that when the Divine *perichoresis* enters into the human scene by God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—indwelling Man and Man indwelling Them, then the giving—receiving—giving circulatory movement has its most glorious operation in both Man and God. Man gives out to the whole human community the gifts of God, and their benefits. Whilst these may be rejected in stony silence by the ingrates, and even in rage by those who see grace as horribly humiliating, yet others will respond gratefully as the glory of God breaks through to them. The witness of the early church was impressive to those who viewed it. They could scarcely comprehend the receiving—giving love that was continually manifested before their eyes.

The true *perichoresis* is the most practical of all things that operates in this world. Sinful Man is never so dead that he does not exercise elements of it on strange and wonderful occasions. History is filled with glorious examples of Man giving himself for others. Indeed far more is being given than our small and cynical minds ever notice. To live is to give: to give is to live. To save ourselves for ourselves is to die in

ourselves. When the glory of giving breaks through, the community is changed. The story *Miracle on the River Kwai* is a glimpse into such a community, but it was not the first time this scene was played in history.

THE THINGS WE OWN AND THE THINGS WE GIVE

Covering all these gifts would demand much time and space. We have seen the gifts of saving grace, the gifts for living life, the gifts for the operations of the church and its edification, and we have seen the gifts which work out towards the world in proclamation of saving grace. Such gifts are not only utilitarian: they are also personal gifts which sustain, support and build us up. Since God's gifts are without recall they are always present. They are to be enjoyed.

A passage I would like to take, and indeed a passage which is much of the reason for this final essay, is the third chapter of I Corinthians. I have no desire to give a lengthy explanation or exegesis of it. I need to give some overall picture of the chapter, but it is on verses 18–23 I wish to concentrate:

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their craftiness,' and again, 'The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.' So let no one boast of men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

This passage speaks of some of the gifts that are ours. They are different from other lists given. In fact the list is so vast and comprised of such new factors that we wonder at it all. Yet in the whole chapter it makes excellent sense. At the beginning of the chapter Paul has had to chide some Corinthian believers for their spiritual immaturity. The sense of the chapter goes something like this: the believers are immature because they have divided into parties, claiming as their leaders Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas (Peter). By lining up behind one or other of these they are saying their teacher or apostle is primary, that prior wisdom comes from him and therefore they have appropriate wisdom. Paul shows that these men—fine as they may be—are simply servants of Christ, and whilst their work may differ, for example, planting and watering, yet the actual growth of a plant comes not from the sower, the planter or the waterer, but from God. Paul claims all he has done has been by the grace of God (cf. I Cor. 15:10), and the day of its testing will prove what was the value of his, Apollos's and Cephas's work. The following each has will have nothing to do with that outcome, for nothing of that sort justifies anyone's ministry.

Paul (v. 16) then switches to another figure, namely that of the temple of God. All believers constitute that holy temple (cf. Eph. 2:18–22; I Pet. 2:4–10), for the Holy Spirit dwells in them all. Whilst the temple cannot be destroyed, yet there can be those in it who bring harm to it, as indeed these believers in their carnal state⁶

⁶ It is clear from verse 3 that the fleshliness of the believers is shown in their 'jealousy and strife'—something which does harm to the temple of God.

may be doing. Those who do harm will be judged by God. This should halt the foolish carnal Christians in their tracks!

In the verses we have printed above, Paul comes to the crux of the matter. The problem of the party-members is that they are still thinking in terms of human brilliance, that is, wisdom. Paul says that if anyone thinks he is wise in this age (aeon) then he had better think again. Let him lose the wisdom of this world that he might become wise in God, in Christ, in the Cross, for it is just this Paul has stressed in I Corinthians 1:17–31. There the religious wisdom of the Jew and the intellectual wisdom of the Greek have been shown to be threadbare and shabby against Christ crucified, 'the power of God and the wisdom of God'. Paul has shown them that the Cross is God's wisdom. Few, if any, of the Corinthians were wise, powerful and 'something' by nature. This had given them a good head start on the wise, powerful and clever by nature. Christ had been made their 'wisdom . . . righteousness and sanctification and redemption', so that if they wished in any way to boast, it would have to be in him, 'Christ crucified . . . the power of God and the wisdom of God'.

So, then, in 3:18–20 Paul is saying—quoting freely from the Old Testament (Job 5:13; Ps. 94:11, LXX)—that the self-opinionated, 'wise' man is always caught out in his so-called wisdom. God regards his sort with a steely eye. So let the foolish Corinthians get back to godly wisdom. It is clear that their view of the teachers was that this one or that one was the wisest, so that they adhered to him. Paraphrased, Paul is saying: 'Why! In the wisdom of God there is nothing held back from you: everything is yours! You do not follow one or other of

these teachers. They are yours! You are not their followers: they have no dominion over you. You are not to admire them as being away and above you. They belong to you. *They are your servants*, appointed by God to *serve* you. And with them the other gifts are yours, that is, the world, life, death, the present and the future. You belong to Christ and are in him, and he belongs to God and is in Him’.

In regard to Paul, Apollos and Cephas, the party-minded had been cutting themselves off from all the riches the other teachers could bring them, but in fact they were cutting themselves off from the riches of the leader to whom they devoted themselves. Thinking they were getting the best—that is, the brilliant—to build up their egos, they were missing the heart of the gospel which is always the wisdom of God. What wisdom they were not hearing and not knowing! To hearken back to our theme of *perichoresis*—what riches they were not sharing with others! Even the differentiations of the teachers was one of the richest gifts they could receive, and share.

THE SPECIAL GIFTS FOR HAVING AND SHARING

As we have suggested above, this list of gifts is special. It becomes even more than that when we look at Romans 8:36–39, where Paul pictures the believers in an unending—though victorious—battle against strong enemies and odds. Common to both passages are *death, life, things present and things to come*. None of these things in Romans 8:38–39 will separate God’s people

from His love in Christ. In the Corinthians passage the *world*—that is, the *kosmos* and not the *aeon* (v. 22)—is added. What does Paul mean by saying in Romans 8 that these things are our enemies, trying to separate us from the love of God in Christ, whilst here he is saying that these very things *belong* to us?

The answer must lie in the fact of ‘all things’ (v. 21). In one way Paul is saying that there is nothing in all creation which is not ours, and in another there is nothing that we cannot control. Perhaps the thoughts of Romans 8:36–39 and I Corinthians 3:21–23 are very close in meaning. In fact those things in Romans 8:36–39 which are at enmity with Man and seek to overcome him cannot do so. To the contrary: *in* all these things the believers are more than conquerors.⁷ I Corinthians 3:21–23 is implying the reason is that Man-in-Christ has overcome *them*. ‘You are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s’ is the key to Man having ‘all things’ *now*. Because Christ reigns over all things *now*, so do believers *in him*. This is evident from Romans 5:17 and Ephesians 2:5–6. Whilst these two references may have some eschatological significance, they have primary reference to the present (cf. Rev. 2:26–27; 3:21). Undoubtedly II Timothy 2:12, I Corinthians 6:3 and Revelation 5:10⁸ have primary eschatological reference, but the continuity of Christ’s triumph from the point of the Resurrection, and the triumph of his people from that point onwards in

⁷ Hence ‘he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world’, and ‘I can do all things in him who strengthens me’.

⁸ In regard to the present reigning of Christ and so the reigning of his people, I believe Revelation 20:1–4 deserves a lot more attention than it has received. I have worked something of this out in my *The Matter of the Millennium* (NCPI, 1991).

history, is a truth greatly neglected, and yet is of immense *present* importance. Doubtless it was because the spiritually stunted Corinthians did not know all these things were theirs that they pursued the pathetic hunt for so-called wisdom. They believed this would make them to be something. How wrongly they had read Paul, Apollos and Cephas!

The Gift of the World

What would it be if we possessed the world, that is, it did not possess us? The world is defined in various ways, such as the created world which we know belongs wholly to God, and Satan has no part in it: 'For the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it' (I Cor. 10:26; Ps. 24:1; 50:12; I Tim. 4:4). There have always been erroneous ideas that somehow the Devil has wrested something of this from God. The Christian is to see the world as his, but then he is not to love anything of it above God, since such is idolatry (cf. I John 2:15–17; I Cor. 7:31). With the idea of the created world is also the idea of an evil system⁹ which Satan has devised and developed (John 12:31; 14:30–31; 16:11; II Cor. 4:4). This world's leader is Satan.¹⁰ Fallen Man is—perforce—under his rule (II Tim. 2:26; Eph. 2:1–3; cf. John 8:38, 44; cf. I John 3:10ff.). This world has its own

⁹ It is notable that Paul uses both terms *aeon* and *kosmos* interchangeably when he wishes. This is seen in I Corinthians 1:20. The term *aeon*, used for the evil world in Galatians 1:4 (cf. 6:14, *kosmos*), can be translated *age*, and in Ephesians 1:21, Christ is the head of this age (cf. Gal. 1:4) and the age to come.

¹⁰ For a more extensive study of these matters see my *The Clash of the Kingdoms* (NCPI, 1989).

wisdom, as we have seen in both the first and third chapters of the First Letter to the Corinthians.

That believers possess the world is often taken to mean they possess only the created world, but surely Paul is saying they are also above the world which is led by Satan, and is called 'this present evil age'. John in his First Letter makes the point that Christ in believers is greater than Satan in the world, and he says that believers have overcome the spirit of Antichrist. He tells the young men that they have overcome the evil one, and says the victory that overcomes the world is faith. In Revelation 12:9–11 the believers have conquered 'that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan', by 'the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony'. Both Peter and James insist that humble believers can resist Satan and he will be overcome, even fleeing from them. This is how things are: believers have been rescued 'up out of' this present corrupt world (Gal. 1:4), and they have been crucified to the world and the world has been crucified to them (Gal. 6:14), and one day they shall judge the world.

When the small-minded believers at Corinth realise that not only is the created world theirs, but also that they are over the world of evil—that is, it cannot defeat them—there will be a new spirit of confident faith and of quiet triumph in life. This is a wonderful gift to share.

The Gifts of Life and Death

Life that is lived in the fear of death (Heb. 2:14–15) is no life. Perfect love casts out fear, for fear relates to torment, and he who fears is not made perfect in love.

This message of John and its context (I John 4:7–20) tells us that fear of judgment is a constant torment and takes away the joy of life. Paul's statement regarding Jesus that he 'abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel', as also his grand exposition in I Corinthians 15 of the defeat of death through the Cross and Resurrection, shows us there is no sting to death. The prospect of immortality is that which makes this life so wonderful. Jesus' own statement, 'whoever lives and believes in me shall never die', is enough to encourage us that we shall never see death. It is true enough that others will see our death, but we will not. Already in eternal life (John 3:16; 5:24; I John 5:12), we will not actually experience death as death.

This means, then, that *death belongs to us*. It cannot frighten us, for we love not our lives unto death. What others call 'death' cannot separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. We are constantly in the life of God, and the life of God is in us. So, then, to live is Christ; the life we live, we live by faith in the Son of God. Living life to the full is living in God and living out all in God. The dimensions of such experience are limitless. Nothing can reduce the steady joy and love and peace and creative fruitfulness of life, since no fear of death hangs over it. This is lordship over life and lordship over death. The two belong to us. *What a wonderful truth to share with others!*

The Gift of the Present and the Future

It is axiomatic that he who has no past—whatever it may have been—has no full present and future. The

present—like the world, and life, and death—does not belong to Satan and his evil powers. It belongs to those in Christ. The believer has a past which has been purified (Isa. 1:18; I Cor. 6:11; II Cor. 5:17; Heb. 9:14), and that is why his present is so rich and free. It is not only free *of* the past, but it is also free to use the past as it wills. Justification is the great liberator of the con-science and of the spirit. The continuity of past, present and future is assured by justification.

The future of the believer has been assured by the promises and realities which we have seen in previous passages, of the coming revelation of personal identity, resurrection into the fullness of life, glorification, the treasures of inheritance, and vocation of the royal priesthood. Whilst there is no need for us to dwell upon these here, it is for us to keep living in the hope of them. The future assures the present, as the present assures the past of its value and its reality with present and future.

Knowing that we possess life, and that death cannot damage us but is rather something never to be feared, we can see something of the glory of these two gifts. *How rich a thing to share them with others!*

The Living Context of All the Gifts

We now come to the point of this last essay. None of these gifts is a commodity given by God to any believer, to be possessed by that one and utilised as thought fit. When we are Christ's and Christ is God's, then our context is dwelling in God and having God dwell in us. Hence the operations of the gifts are a present dynamic reality. The immature believers at Corinth had believed themselves inferior, requiring status derived

from the particular leader they followed, and seeking to discover some special ‘wisdom’ which would give them standing as humans and a place in their community—a special place.

Paul shattered those miserable ideas, but brought them out into a larger place. As in another Letter, he prayed his readers would be ‘filled unto all the fullness of God’, and in another said that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge were hid in Christ, and that from them they were ‘filled full’, so now he shows that being in Christ, and Christ being in God, all these gifts are dynamic and operative realities.

THE TEMPORAL AND ETERNAL *PERICHORESIS*

This essay has been long, but by no means wholly comprehensive. Enough has been said to show that the gifts Paul nominates in I Corinthians 3:21–23 are of such a nature that if the believer is not aware of them, then he is far from the wisdom of God. All we have said in previous chapters now comes into practical view in the *perichoresis* of these gifts as it is enacted in today’s church and society. It brings a rich understanding that Christ’s victory is complete, that his action is now, and that we do not have to wait until glory for the circulatory movement of the gifts to begin, but that these can now be shared—that is, gifts creational, gifts ministerial, gifts ecclesial, gifts charismatic, and the strange but wonderful gifts of teachers, of the world, of life and death, of the present and the future. Of course they are all in Christ and Christ is in God, but this means that the

Divine *perichoresis* is not limited to the relationships within the Godhead, but that it flows to Man and then from Man to all humanity.

Rightly understood, this explains the dynamics of true temporal and eternal living. It is the key to all history, as it is true history itself.

APPENDIX¹

Superordination and Subordination

THE QUESTION OF THE TWO ELEMENTS

The question of superordination and subordination is not a new one. In fact, it is paramount in all theology. The reasons for this are many, that is, related to authority and law, and they commence with the Triune God-head. Is there a Person of that Godhead who is before another? Is there an inbuilt hierarchy in the Godhead, such as seems to be suggested by the prior situation of the Father with His *principium*, and the seeming posterior positions of the Son and the Holy Spirit? Since the Son is eternally generated by or from the Father, and proceeds from Him, and since the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father (Eastern Orthodox position), and the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son (West-ern church position), then something like an hierarchy

¹ The text of this Appendix, with a few minor alterations, has been taken from my unpublished thesis, *The Glory of God and Human Relationships*.

appears to be the case, albeit that hierarchy ought not to be understood as other than benign and other than in love.

Any form of superordination and of subordination is fiercely contested by those who correctly discern that if there is any structure of hierarchy in the Triune Godhead, then that must be the ontological order for human-ity. This then affects the whole matter of authority and law, all forms of leadership and, of course, the matter of male and female gender order. It immediately makes its impact upon masculinists and feminists. The masculinist appears to be given ascendancy by it, and a weapon to battle with the feminist, whilst the feminist appears to be put down, and has virtually no argument regarding an ontological equality of the genders. The matters of authority and law all have to be seen in an hierarchical *schema* if there is superordination and subordination in a true ontology.

On the other hand, if there is no superordination–subordination structure within the Triune Godhead, but all Three Persons are equal, then the feminist appears to have a weapon to use against the masculinist, and he has no moral support for his view that the male is superordinate. Of course, logically speaking, the male and the female would have equality within the human race, so that both masculinist and feminist have no grounds for claiming prior quality or status—one over the other. Also the matters of authority and law would have to be appraised and their functional nature assessed.

A Problem in the Enquiry

What we have to recognise are the many problems which present a difficulty to honest research. Egalitarian

thinkers have long suggested that, whilst law and authority are matters *de facto* in human history, they may not be matters *de jure*; that is, that these two things have arisen because of the fall of Man and angels, this necessitating law and authorities to keep order, so that they are not part of the ontological order. They insist that essentially authority and law are unnecessary, and modern humanist egalitarianism does all in its power to ameliorate or abolish both.

There is no human person on the earth who lacks a bias one way or the other. No human person can—unaided—speak the truth. Many of us who do seek to tell the truth are not aware that we mostly fail to do so. Take, for example, our masculist and feminist. Each has an axe to grind; neither is unprejudiced. This, of course, would go for so many other cases. The only possible way to be useful in the discussion is to be totally unprejudiced, totally objective and totally truthful. Alas! No human being can be so, though most of us would claim to be so, and many would appear to be so.

What then? Can nothing be done? Yes, something can be done. On the human level we can seek to be humble, open to other views, desirous of recognising the truth at any cost, being prepared to accept it, no matter how it may affect us. Much of this endeavour happens in human society. However, it is not fault-proof, and sooner or later its fallibility emerges, especially in the dialectic of thesis—antithesis—synthesis. The only way, so far as I can see, is a theological one; that is, for all members in the debate—which would then not constitute debate but research—to be justified. That is, when human beings have no drive to be right, can admit to faulty thinking, are open to correction and have no

axe to grind other than the truth, then research is possible. I have to admit that as a sinful human being I do not desire any form of hierarchy, any authority that will inhibit my freedom, nor any gender-person to be superior to me or, for that matter, to be necessarily inferior to me. As a male I cannot impartially pursue the matter the feminists place before me, for I will fear females, or desire their esteem of me, or resist anything of feminism which will cause me to feel guilty for my masculism and which will inhibit me in the freedom I have as a male. A female person would—I take it—have similar prejudicial problems. A feminist would have even more problems when she (or he) would seek to effect redress for injustices done to women, as well as seek to create practical equality for the genders.

Some who read these paragraphs will smile at my naïvety. ‘Who’, they will ask, ‘could be so simplistic as to wait for participators in the debate to be justified, and so to be impartial?’ I recognise that it would be a rare case when such impartiality might obtain, but I present the matter because I am convinced that the present superordination—subordination debate is not carried out without bias. I think we should be realistic and recognise this fact, and somehow temper our prejudices in order to advance towards a true position. When good exegetes arrive at opposite interpretations of passages common to the feminist—masculist debate, then some-thing must be amiss.

Another Factor to Be Considered

When the issue is one of authority and so of law, there is the question of a person’s attitude to both these

things. Those who think that the need for, and institution of, authority has resulted from man's rebellion and is only for this age will have a certain view of authority, and this will temper their view of superordination and subordination. Again, the question must be raised as to whether all who have a seated objection to authority do not—out of this attitude—oppose anything that is hierarchical, and cannot accept the fact that there is anything of superordination or subordination within the Triune Godhead. What we need to do is at least admit the possibility that true hierarchy may not necessarily be wrong, and may contain within it a truth—if not *the* truth—which may be of great value, and without which, perhaps, we may fail to fully understand the whole matter of love and relationships. If it can be shown that there is nothing of leadership, primacy or headship within the Trinity, then we have to admit that these elements in human society are not of the essential (ontological) order of things, and are—at the best—forced upon us in temporality, and will be dispensed with in the age to come. It is simple to discern the subjective approach that others have to this matter of subordination, without discerning our own 'hidden agenda'.

THE MATTER OF SUPERORDINATION AND SUBORDINATION ITSELF

Where do we most profitably commence our investigation? I am sure it does begin with the Godhead, for the relationships of the Three Persons is the paradigm of all true relationships—the source and ground of all true

human relationships. Even so, we have a problem, and it is one of terms. Some of us personally have never been able to subscribe to the view that superordination must mean superiority and subordination imply inferiority. I am not alone in thinking that one can be in a superordinate position and not consider himself or herself to be superior to one subordinate in office or rank. I believe we have to separate the subjective impressions persons have in these situations from the reality of their positions. I have noticed that the idea persists strongly that to be superordinate is to be superior to the one who is subordinate.

Again some of us have problems with the words 'equality' and 'inequality'.² We do not know from what they arise. Are any two human beings equals in the sense that they are equivocals? No two leaves have the same venation pattern, nor are there any two fingers which have the same prints. Doubtless some of us may have an impediment to proper thinking about equality, but whilst people like us exist, something will have to be done about the words 'equality' and 'inequality'. We must recognise that the unity of all things exists in their rich diversity. In practice we recognise what is meant by 'equality' in terms of value, esteem, honour and opportunity, and in general we seek to work in accordance with these evaluations, but even so, some of us are baffled as to how to arrive at *particular* 'equality'. Should

² Most people would have a problem of even greater dimensions if they could not equate 'superordinate' with 'superior' and 'subordinate' with 'inferior'. We know the quip of honest egalitarians, 'All human beings are equal, but some are more equal than others'. Doubtless purist egalitarian theologians put this down to the sinfulness of human beings—a fruit of the Fall!

we not think in terms of ‘totality’, that is, we do not love each of our children *equally* but—ideally—we love each *totally*. God certainly does not love by degrees. We see a woman as having total value—as a woman—and a man total value—as a man. Qualitatively we seek to see a person as he or she is, and indeed that goes for all creatures and things and no less for the Persons of the Godhead. One is Father, another is Son, and another is the Spirit of these Two. We suppose that is why ‘equality’ and ‘inequality’ have no essential meaning for some of us. Of course we are human (and sinful) enough to glow when we are accepted as ‘equals’, and to feel resentful when we are considered as being ‘subordinate’ and ‘unequal’, but in our more impartial moods we see the inanity of such reactions.

Relationships within the Godhead

We should all recognise it to be an historical fact that the matters of the superordination of the Father, and the subordination of the Son, and then of the Spirit, were at the heart of the Christological controversies of the third and fourth centuries, and indeed are still with us today. The Arians—arguing from the Scriptures—based their unitarianism on the fact that the Son was subordinate to the Father, and, indeed, in being unequal with the Father, could not be considered to have Deity. The Trinitarians, such as Athanasius—basing their arguments on the Scriptures—argued that the Son as touching the Godhead was equal with the Father and the Spirit, but as touching his manhood was inferior to the Father. It was (and still is) argued that the Son lowered himself to become a man, but that in no way did he lower his

deity—an impossible exercise by nature of the case. There were and are those who see the *kenosis* of the Son as an emptying of himself of qualities or prerogatives of (his) deity, but that these discarded elements were restored to him at his ascension and glorification. Docetists argue for the deity of the Son but refuse his genuine humanity, saying he did not actually become a man, and that humanity is not part, now, of his personal being.

Whilst many of us are grateful that the outcome of the Christological controversies has been the credal acceptance of Christ’s deity—to which is attached his humanity—yet others have felt that the metaphysical argument of ‘substance’ (*homoousius*) is an abstract argument, and whilst it may accord properly with the historical revelation of God as Father, as the Son of the Father, and the Spirit as personally the Spirit of the Father and the Son, as these were set out in the early Christian writings of the New Testament, yet the theology is in metaphysical terms rather than biblical. Some who would have liked to have seen the Christological controversy resolved more on the matter of the meaning of person and relationships nevertheless appreciate the abstract argument of ‘the substance’, feeling it was a useful line to argue, and whilst they do not consider the constant use of the word ‘equal’ in the Athanasian Creed to be the best way of expressing the deity of the Three Persons, yet they accept that that was how it had to be stated at that time, so that it could dogmatically preserve the doctrine of the Trinity and save the church from Arianism.

The question today is, ‘Now that the primary threat of Arianism is not present or immediate in the same

measure, can we discuss the relationships within the Trinity—particularly the principle of subordination—without being accused of Arianism?³ If we should venture to speak of a form of subordination within the Triune Godhead, can we do so without those who are equalitarian raising the accusation that we are necessarily reverting to Arianism? We are aware—at this point—that many Arians were accused of being authoritarian in their leaning and practice,⁴ but the matter is not an *either-or* situation. Doubtless some of us who have a philosophy of equality in the Godhead and in humankind may be authoritarian in practice.

One can hold a view of the subordination of the Son to the Father without espousing subordinationism, especially Arian subordinationism. The use of the term ‘subordinationism’ is often intended to conjure up an image of the crass authoritarianism of the superordinate person.

³ We need to keep in mind the difference between subordination as a hierarchical principle, and ‘subordinationism’ as a doctrine which assumes the inferiority of the Son and the Spirit.

⁴ Charles Sherlock (*Interchange*, no. 45, AFES, 1989, p. 53) states:

The doctrine of the Trinity is the very antithesis of ‘controlling’, power-dominated ideas. It is monism, or deism—‘plain oneness’ views of God—which are linked with so-called ‘masculine’ power. One God—one emperor—one empire is a convenient ideology for autocrats! That is possibly why the Arians held sway often in the imperial courts. Quite simply, only a Trinitarian God can be Love.

One wonders whether Arians in particular were alone given over to this kind of domination, and whether those who held to the *Quinque Vult* were not! Sherlock also speaks of ‘Arian patriarchalism’. Most feminists would wonder whether patriarchalism began and finished with the Arians. Sherlock and many like him assume that patriarchalism is, *per se*, wrong. The debate, surely, is still open.

The Interdwelling of the Three Persons

In the text of our study we have already looked at the interdwelling of the Three Persons. It seems to me that the authoritarian element in any hierarchy must be that each member of that system insists on autonomy in his or her situation, works bureaucratically within his/her domain, and does not have a personal loving inter-relationship with other members in the functional out-working of that system. The nature of God being love, and love being essentially interpersonal, the rigid nature of a hierarchy as it is generally perceived is lost. No one member works without an intimate relationship with all members, nor without the uninterrupted *perichoresis-circumincessio* of all members. The *perichoresis* is what dissolves the (imagined) superior-inferior interpretation of anything that is functionally superordinate or sub-ordinate. Within the Triune Godhead the Father gives His Fatherhood to the Son, the Son his Sonship to the Father, the Spirit his servant-attendance on both, and all Three are mutually interdependent and *perichoretic*. We have previously seen that the Three honour and glorify one another, give to one another, receive from one another, and share together in the great works of creation, redemption, and the ultimate regeneration of the creation. This kind of functional hierarchy—if it may be called so—dissolves the rigidity of an authoritarian *view* of the hierarchy as some see it in a text such as I Corinthians 11:3, ‘But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God’, and others of the Pauline and Petrine passages relating to marriage and to ecclesiastical leadership.

The Eternal Interdwelling

In John 17:7 Jesus tells the Father, ‘Now they know that everything that thou hast given me is from thee; for I have given them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from thee; and they have believed that thou didst send me’. Just prior to this high-priestly prayer for them he had told the disciples, ‘I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leav-ing the world and going to the Father’. In response to this the disciples had said, ‘Ah, now you are speaking plainly, not in any figure! Now we know that you know all things, and need none to question you; by this we believe that you came from God’. Jesus was say-ing that he had come from the Father and was going to the Father. He had also told them earlier that he was going to prepare a place for them in the Father’s household.

Later John, in writing of the Son whom he had come to know, said, ‘the only Son, who *is in* the bosom of the Father, he has made him [God; God the Father] known [emphasis mine]’ (John 1:18). Previously (1:14) he had spoken of Jesus in the term ‘as of the only Son *from* the Father [emphasis mine]’. The normal place for the Son is the Father’s bosom. He had left this bosom to come to Man. The interdwelling of the Father and the Son has not been interrupted by the incarnation, for he prays, ‘that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us’ (John 17:21). The Son then speaks of the glory given to him: ‘The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in

them and thou in me’. In some sense the giver must be prior to the receiver of the gift.

The Matter of Personal, Functional Operations

Without rigidly defining the roles of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, we see that the Persons made—and make—their contributions from their situations of being Father, Son and Spirit in the operations of creation, redemption, and the ultimate renewal of the heavens and the earth—along with all their creatures, celestial and terrestrial.⁵ We find the Father giving the Son commands,⁶ the Son gladly

⁵ Here we need to see the functional areas of the Persons and their co-operation within their unity. Thus in creation, redemption and the ultimate renewal of all things, we find the three Persons working as One.

⁶ The immediate question is raised, ‘Whilst it is true that the Son obeys the Father (e.g. John 10:17–18; 14:31), is this an obedience only within the realm of his humanity, but not within his deity? Does not the Father give the Son orders in the realm of their deity?’. I think the question reveals the mind of the questioner, and shows that he thinks commands can only be given in the interests of Man’s redemption, and at the level of the Son’s humanity; that is, that whilst the Son in the immanent Trinity is not subordinate since he is not given commands, yet in the economic (revelational) Trinity he receives commands related to his humanity. This would negate most of the uses of the verbs *apostello* and *exapostello*, along with other ‘sending’ verbs. The Son is sent into the world by a directive which includes the directive of the incarnation. It is interesting that in Galatians 4:4–6 the Son is sent ‘out of’ the Father, and the Spirit is also sent ‘out of’ the Father. It needs to be seen continuously that if God commands (sends) the Spirit, then the sending of the Son must be on the same level of deity, since the Spirit does not ‘take flesh’. The deity of the Holy Spirit is present in any commanding or sending. In the present era of the church he is ‘the Lord the Spirit’ (II Cor. 3:17–18), and the community is led by the Spirit. As he had led the Son (Luke 4:1, 14) so he led the children of God (Rom. 8:14). This against R. G. Gruenler, *The Trinity in the Gospel of John* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1986, p. xvii):

Our study describes one of the characteristic modes by which the persons of the Triune Family disclose their interaction in the redemptive process. The incarnate Son subordinates himself to the will of the Father for the work of salvation, and the Holy Spirit subordinates himself to the will of Father and Son in carrying out the work . . . But it is also clear from Jesus’ complementary claims to equality with the Father ([John] 10:30; 17:11) and his intimation that the Holy Spirit shares equally in carrying out the work of salvation (14:16–17, 26; 16:13–15) that such subordination is voluntarily assumed and flows out of the dynamic and mutual hospitality of the divine Family as a unity.

accepting these, and fulfilling them, whilst the Spirit also receives commands and carries them out.⁷ Even the Son gives commands to the Father; for example, the high-priestly prayer of John 17, when the Son charges the Father with accomplishing a number of things.⁸ It may well be argued that these are not commands so much as petitions, but John 17:24 has Christ saying, ‘Father, I desire that they also, whom

Gruenler is according subordination to the Spirit, and appears to be saying that it is because the Spirit is on the work of salvation that he is subordinate. Carried to a logical conclusion, any work done in the creation—whether it be creation, redemption or the restoration of all things—is a work which subordinates the member of the Trinity occupied in it. This would have to include the Father Himself!

⁷ In John chapters 14 to 16 Jesus speaks of the Father sending the Spirit (14:26), of himself sending the Spirit (15:26; 16:7), so that the Spirit is seen to be subject to the Father and the Son. It is this ‘subjection’ which interests us who know virtually nothing of a human *perichoresis*, and so can know little of a Divine one.

⁸ These commands are not limited to the high-priestly prayers. See also the tone of prayer in Gethsemane, ‘Father if it be thy will’, for the Son does not request help outside the will of his Father, or even seek to circumvent his own manhood in knowing that will. In John 14:13, 15:7, and 16:24, the Son is the one in whose name the disciples are (now) told to approach God and petition Him, so that ‘Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name I will do it’. In this sense the name of the Father and the name of the Son are as one (cf. Matt. 28:19, where there is one name for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit).

thou hast given⁹ me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world’. Here ‘I desire’ (*thelo*) can be translated ‘I wish’ or ‘I will’, and carries something of a command in it. Is it that between the Divine Persons it can be said, ‘Your every wish is my command: your every command is my wish’?

Is it an incipient legalism which makes us haggle about the Persons and try to protect the One against the *principium* (first in time or order) of Another? Did not Jesus say to his disciples, ‘If you love me you will keep my commandments’, and did not the apostle John add, ‘And his commandments are not burdensome’? Have we missed the ‘ontological joy of obedience’, or—better still—‘the ontological joy of Sonship’? Legalism and love do not go together.

How could we have missed the perfect harmony between the Father and the Son, where haggling is absent? As on earth, so in heaven: as in heaven so on earth—incarnation notwithstanding. ‘The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise.’ The key to the mystery is, ‘For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is

⁹ The word ‘given’ may be some indicator to understanding the relationship between the Father and the Son. What the Son has, has been *given* to him by the Father. The verb is used 15 times in John 17. The Son has been given authority over all flesh, has been given ‘the elect children’ (cf. Heb. 2:13; Isa. 8:17–18), the work to do on earth, the word and the words the Father has, the name of the Father, ‘everything’ (v. 7), and the glory. Whilst some things are given to the Son in his humanity, some things are also given to him in his deity—before creation. It must be admitted that there is some sense, functionally, where the giver is prior—though not prior in time—to the receiver.

doing; and greater works than these will he show him, that you may marvel'. Jesus had previously told them, 'The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand'. We find the same 'Johannine thunderbolt' in Matthew 11:27 and Luke 10:22:

All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Paul speaks to the Colossian church of 'the Son of his love', which, whilst it may have overtones of election, still reveals the heart of the Father in His love for His only Son.

The Son reveals the mind of the Father: 'For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again... this charge I have received from my Father'. The Son's response to the Father is, 'I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father'. On our human level we hear Paul say, 'The love of Christ controls me', and we know obedience is the fruit of love. The Father and the Son have ever been working together. Far from being an impediment, the *principium* of the Father is a powerful force in the functional operations of the Father and the Son, and—for that matter—of the co-operative Spirit.

Love Is the Key to Divine and Human Relationships

Love is the key to the Son knowing the Father and the Father knowing the Son, and to each knowing the Spirit, as he them. Their knowledge of one another is of

love, so that where love is absent in us we cannot understand the Oneness of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. John, in speaking to the children of God, says, 'Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God'. The Members of the Triune Godhead know one another. They *are* love, for 'God is love' (I John 4:8, 16). Love, then, is 'of God'. The Father loves the Son, and the Son the Father—as we have seen—whilst the Spirit is himself the Spirit of love (Rom. 5:5; 15:30; Gal. 5:22; Col. 1:8). The love of the Three for one another is too deep, too incomprehensible for us, although we do have knowledge of the love of God in so far as we know His love for us. It was the desire of the Son that his elect people should know this love of God, so that he prayed:

... I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me.

In this sense, then, we *can* know the love of God, and doubtless it is to this that Paul refers in Romans 5:5: 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us'. He prays in Ephesians 3:19 that his readers may come 'to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge' (*gnonai te ten hyperballousantes gnoseos agapen tou Christou*), so that humans, by the divine power of the Holy Spirit, can know at least *something* of the love the Members of the Trinity have for one another.

We say, then, that in this love the Persons utterly know one another, and human beings would have to approach this kind of knowledge before they could

understand the way in which the Son and Spirit would understand the *principium* of the Father. Having grasped this fact we can now look at the Johannine texts which seem to speak on the one hand of the subordination of the Son and the Spirit to the Father, and on the other of the Son being one with the Father. We are saying that our human, horizontal feelings about subordination may blind us to the glory of divine subordination and superordination.¹⁰ If we assume that subordination is linked only with the realm of humanity, and so with our Lord's incarnation, then we attribute that humanity—as we do authority and law—to the

¹⁰ Throughout Scripture it is evident that joy comes in submission and surrender to the Lordship of God. The exaltation of God is a great theme of the doxological Psalms. Thomas's surrender to Jesus—'My Lord and my God!', and even Peter's cry, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord', has the note of worshipful wonderment. The doxological passages in the Revelation show the joy that men and angels display in their submission to God. In demeaning the idea of subordination we may miss one of the most profound truths of Scripture. I believe there may be a parallel in the matter of subordination to an observation by Father Danielou on the matter of the wrath of God, quoted by J. G. Mackenzie in his book *Guilt: Its Meaning and Significance* (Allen and Unwin, London, 1962, p. 150):

We have to reckon, whether we like it or not, with wrath as one of the divine attributes: and, what is more, for all its anthropomorphic appearance, this particular word may carry a stronger charge of mystical significance than any other, and afford the deepest insight into the meaning of the divine transcendence.

I am not referring here to wrath, but the principle that a word or an idea—for example, the idea of subordination—'may carry a stronger charge of mystical significance than any other, and afford the deepest insight into the meaning of the divine transcendence'. In presupposing subordination to be a bad thing, or in seeing it as a temporary factor by reason of the incarnation, we 'may miss the many-splendoured thing'—perhaps the deepest expression of love and loving service.

fact and scene of human rebellion. The meaning of worship is thereby drained of its richest element—serving—and we may be forced to reject the heart of our Lord's teaching on humility, that is, on being the least and thereby being the greatest in the sense of true greatness.

THE JOHANNINE TEXTS RELATING TO SUBORDINATION AND SUPERORDINATION

John 14:28

The primary text regarding discussion on subordination and superordination is John 14:28: 'If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; *for the Father is greater than I*.'

Most of the following commentaries seem to favour the fact that any subordination the Son has to the Father is only because of his incarnation, but some of them go beyond that thesis:

Raymond E. Brown:

If we seek to explain the passage without the intervention of the formal dogmatics of a later period, the key probably lies in a similar statement made in xiii 16: 'No messenger is more important than the one who sent him.' We have already explained that statements like 'The Father and I are one' (x 30) and 'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father' (xiv 9) have their background in the Jewish concept of the relationship between a messenger or agent and the one who sent him . . . During his mission on earth he is less than the One who sent him, but his departure signifies that the work that the Father has given him to do is completed. Now he will be

glorified with that glory that he had with the Father before the world existed.¹¹

J. N. Sanders and B. A. Mastin:

The statement that **the Father is greater than** the Son, torn from its context, became the subject of fierce controversy in the later phases of the Arian controversy. But the dogmatic issues then raised are beyond the horizons of the FG [Fourth Gospel], for which the inferiority of the Son is due to the fact that he is his Father's agent, fulfilling his will, and subordinating his own to it.¹²

'The Father is greater than I' presents difficulties for those who hold a trinitarian faith. The reference, however, is not to Christ's essential being, but rather to his incarnate state. The incarnation involved the acceptance of a certain subordination as is insisted throughout the New Testament. The saying must be understood in the light of 'I and the Father are one'. John is not asserting, as the Arians maintained, that Jesus was a created being. He is talking about the departure of the human being Jesus from this earth to be with the Father. In the light of this Jesus sees it as a matter for rejoicing when he returns to the Father.

Barnabas Lindars:

Jesus is aware that his mission is entirely derivative from the Father and done in obedience to him. In spite of the horror of the Passion, he has nothing to fear, because he has surrendered himself to the Father (12:28), and the Father is in control of events. The sentence is thus intended to confirm the assurance

¹¹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (xiii-xxi)*, The Anchor Bible, Doubleday, New York, 1970, p. 655.

¹² J. N. Sanders and B. A. Mastin, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St John*, Black's New Testament Commentaries, Adam & Charles Black, London, 1968, p. 334.

which Jesus has already given to the disciples. It is a metaphysical statement only in so far as the concept of sonship necessarily implies subordination to some extent. It does not mean that Jesus is a lesser kind of being, not truly divine. But inevitably this verse played an immense part in the Christological controversies of the third and fourth centuries.¹³

Lindars says, 'It is a metaphysical statement only in so far as the concept of sonship necessarily implies subordination to some extent', and by so saying leaves the way open for an ontological subordination which is not inferiority.

G. R. Beasley-Murray:

The encouraging explanation of the reason for Jesus' impending death and promise of his return, given in vv 2-3, should have brought joy to the disciples, since it is a departure to be with the Father; real love to Jesus would mean rejoicing with him in that prospect. A further ground of such joy is a reminder that the Father, who sent Jesus, and gave him his words to say and works to do, is greater than Jesus, and so *everything is under control*; God will work out his beneficent purpose through the terrifying events of the coming hours, and the disciples may be sure that he will do the like for them in *their* hours of testing . . .

The intent of 'the Father is greater than I' is clear in the context, but the statement has caused immense discussion through the history of the Church, and it played a prominent part in the Arian controversy. The problem has been to reconcile the declaration with intimations in the Gospel of Jesus' oneness with the Father in the Godhead (e.g. 1:1-18; 10:30; 20:28) and with the Church's creedal affirmations of the co-equality of the Father and the Son. Without doubt the statement in v 28 is one with many representations in the Fourth Gospel as to the obedience of the Son to the Father (e.g., 4:34; 8:29) . . . as well as of the origin and end of the Son's mediation in revelation and redemption as being in the Father (e.g., 1:14, 18; 5:21-27). It is doubtful therefore if the

¹³ Barnabas Lindars (ed.), *The Gospel of John*, New Century Bible, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, London, 1977, pp. 484-485.

reference of v 28 can be limited solely to the conditions of the Incarnation (as maintained, e.g., by Cyril of Alexandria, Augustine, etc.) . . . Barrett endeavours to take into account both aspects: 'The Father is *fons divinitatis* in which the being of the Son has its source; the Father is God sending and commanding, the Son is God sent and obedient'.¹⁴

Beasley-Murray's rubric states, 'It is doubtful therefore if the reference of v 28 can be limited solely to the conditions of the Incarnation (as maintained, e.g., by Cyril of Alexandria, Augustine, etc.)'. He, too, leaves the way open for a deeper investigation of the meaning of subordination of the ontological kind. It seems that those opposing subordination fail to see that the 'sending' took place *before* the incarnation. The incarnation was the result of the sending. Barrett's statement, 'The Father is *fons divinitatis* in which the being of the Son has its source; the Father is God sending and commanding, the Son is God sent and obedient', recognises the element of ontological subordination. One is reminded of Hebrews 10:5–6:

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,
 'Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired,
 but a body hast thou prepared for me;
 in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure.
 Then I said, "Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God,"
 as it is written of me in the roll of the book.'

as also of Psalm 40:8—from which is quoted, 'I delight to do thy will, O my God'. His delight in coming does not, somehow, comport with a further word of C. K. Barrett:

¹⁴ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36, Word Books, Waco, Texas, 1987, p. 262.

John is not thinking of the essential relations of the Father and the Son, but of the humiliation of the Son in his earthly life, a humiliation which now, in his death, reached both its climax and its end.¹⁵

We need to take up the matter of humiliation in the light of *Carmen Christi* (Phil. 2:5–11) for this is the passage often called 'the divine condescension' and 'the humiliation of Christ'. I would enter the caveat that there was no 'condescension', regarding the modern usage of that word,¹⁶ and that Christ was in no way humiliated—not even by the death of the Cross. We can say that God's name is profaned by covenant-breaking (cf. Ezek. 36:20ff.) and that His holiness has been despoiled, but *essentially* this cannot be the case.

¹⁵ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, SPCK, London, 1965, p. 391.

¹⁶ *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* says 'condescend' is 'to descend', and figuratively 'to stoop so far as a particular action is concerned, from one's position of dignity or pride: to deign'. It is doubtful whether Jesus saw it that way. I refer the reader back to what I have said: 'Only a proud person can be humiliated'. Doubtless we would be humiliated by having to become incarnate in a lower order of a species, but the passage does not relate his 'humbling' to the act of incarnation but *to the act of the Cross*. Whilst what men and evil powers did to him would have humiliated *us*, he was not humiliated. As the *doulos* of God and Man he humbled himself to do the terrible work of the Cross. If we read the whole passage aright then I think we have to say that (i) he looked not only on his interests, but on the interests of others, (ii) he counted others better than himself, and (iii) he emptied himself for them. The logical conclusion is that 'to be God is to insist on becoming man', especially if one is in the position of Sonship. He did not draw back from some humiliation to come but became incarnate to show the nature of God as Servant. For such there is no humiliation in becoming Man—the Second and True Adam—and as for talk of subordination meaning inferiority, that is scorned, and the teaching of the Servant being greatest opens the door to a new understanding of servanthip, and the rehabilitation of Man as principally Servant by creation.

Likewise the Son in his humanity could display the glory of God. John could say—of his incarnation and work—‘we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father’ (John 1:14). In John’s Gospel we find two things: (i) the Son of God—being the Son of Man—was one with the Father, and (ii) that he gladly confessed the Father to be greater than he. This by no means represented an antinomy.

John 1:1

In John 1:1 we have a text which speaks of the Son’s intimacy with the Father: ‘In the beginning was the Word,¹⁷ and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’. God, of course, was not the Word, since the Word was to express¹⁸ God, and yet he could only do this if he were God and if God were not the Word. In particular we wish to look at the phrase ‘was with God’ —*pros ton theon*.¹⁹

¹⁷ A. Plummer, *The Gospel According to St John* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1913, p. 64) sums up:

The Logos of St John, therefore, is not ‘the thing uttered’ (*ῥημῶς*); nor ‘the One spoken of’ or promised (*ὁ λεγόμενος*); nor ‘He who speaks the word’ (*ὁφ λέγων*); nor a mere attribute of God (as *σοφία* or *νοῦς*). But the Logos is the Son of God, existing from all eternity, and manifested in space and time in the Person of Jesus Christ, in whom had been hidden from eternity all that God had to say to man, and who was the living expression of the Nature and Will of God.

¹⁸ J. B. Phillips in his paraphrase-translation equates ‘the Word’ with ‘the expression’.

¹⁹ A. Plummer, p. 64:

προς τον θεον. *Προς* = ‘*apud*’ or the French ‘*chez*’; it expresses the distinct Personality of the *Λογὸς*, which *ἐν* would have obscured. We might render ‘face to face with God,’ or ‘at home with God.’ So, ‘His sisters, are they not all *with* us (*προς ἡμᾶς*)’ Matt. xiii. 56. Cf. 1 Cor. xvii. 7; Gal. i. 18; 1 Thess. iii. 4; Philem. 13. *Τον θεον* having the article, means the Father.

C. K. Barrett, p. 130:

The Word does not *come to be* with God; the Word *is* with God in the beginning. Cf. 17.5: at the ascension Jesus returns to the position of glory he occupied before creation.

Beasley-Murray, p. 10:

... ‘with God,’ in the sense of ‘in the presence of God’ (cf. Mark 6:3), or ‘in the fellowship of God’ (1 John 1:2–3), or even (as the next clause suggests) ‘in union with God.’

Lindars, p. 84:

We conclude that the above text—John 1:1—speaks of the Son’s oneness with the Father. Being face to face with Him, being towards Him and looking upon Him, all indicate that oneness. He is the one who contemplates God—or how else could he communicate Him? —yet he himself must have deity or he would not be competent to communicate the Godhead. The fact that he is called ‘the Word’ differentiates him from God—who, in the Prologue of John’s Gospel, is ‘the Father’—

... Gr. *pros* (‘in company with’; hence *NEB*: ‘dwelt with’). The usage is not classical, but is found elsewhere in the NT, e.g. Mk 6.3. There may be allusion here to Prov. 8.30 (‘beside him’).

Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, New International Commentary on the N.T., Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1971, pp. 75–76:

‘The Word was with God’ is probably as good a translation as we can manage for a difficult Greek expression. If the preposition is to be taken literally it means ‘the Word was towards God’. John thinks of no opposition between the Word and the Father. The whole existence of the Word was oriented towards the Father. Probably we should understand from the preposition the two ideas of accompaniment and relationship.

Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John (i-xii)*, pp. 4–5:

in God’s presence. We attempt here and in vs. 2 a rendering that will capture the ambiguity of the Gr. *pros ton theon*.

For the remainder of the quote study this reference.

whilst yet being himself one with Him. He was the Logos *before* time, becoming the enfleshed Logos *in* time.

John 5:18

The text of 5:18 speaks further of his oneness with the Father: ‘This was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the sabbath but also called God his own Father, making himself equal with God’.

We have observed before that the text does not say that as Son he made himself equal with the Father, but ‘equal with God’,²⁰ that is, that he was God. To call God his *own* (*idion*) Father was a unique claim. If he had said, ‘Father of all men’ and included himself, that would not have been blasphemy. In the previous verse he had said, ‘My Father is working still, and I am working’, thus making himself parallel in working with God whom he called ‘*my* Father’. In any case, our point is that he claimed God was his Father, and in this sense

²⁰ Raymond Brown (*The Gospel According to John* (i-xii), p. 213) suggests:

‘The Jews’ are charging Jesus with rebellion and pride similar to Adam’s sinful attempt to be like God (Gen. iii 5–6).

C. K. Barrett says (p. 214):

The *kago* of v. 17 places Jesus on a level with God.

Leon Morris adds (p. 310):

Jesus was not teaching men that God is the Father of all. The Jews would have accepted this. He was claiming that God was *His* Father in a special sense. He was claiming that He partook of the same nature as His Father.

he was equal with God. The Jews would have understood that a claim to equality with the Father was *not* made, but the claim that he—Jesus—had deity was made, that is, that he was equal with God.

John 10:29–33

The text of John 10:29–33 relates to Jesus’ implicit claims to deity:

‘My Father, who has given them [the sheep] to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.’ The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, ‘I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of these do you stone me?’ The Jews answered him, ‘It is not for a good work that we stone you but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God.’²¹

²¹ Sanders and Mastin (p. 258), in speaking of verse 30—‘I and the Father are one’—comment:

That the Son **and the Father are one** (ἐ, neuter, literally *one thing*) is not offered as a proposition in metaphysics, but simply as the explanation why an attack on the Son is also an attack on the Father, and so bound to fail. But the complete unity of Son and Father, which has already been expressed in other terms in i. 1; v. 17ff., forms the basis and justification for the later orthodox affirmation of the unity of substance between the divine Persons.

Of the same verse Raymond Brown (*The Gospel According to John* (i-xii), p. 403) says:

This was a key verse in the early Trinitarian controversies . . . On one extreme, the Monarchians (Sabellians) interpreted it to mean ‘one person,’ although the ‘one’ is neuter, not masculine. On the other extreme, the Arians interpreted this text, which was often used against them, in terms of moral unity of will. The Protestant commentator Bengel, following Augustine, sums up the orthodox position: ‘Through the word “are” Sabellius is refuted; through the word “one” so is Arius.’

The matter is clear enough. Jesus is certainly claiming he is God by using the term ‘my Father’ and then saying, ‘I and the Father are one’. His explanation in verses 37–38 is on the basis of his works and his relationship:

If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand *that the Father is in me and I am in the Father*.

Of these two verses C. K. Barrett says:

The crux of the argument is in the character of Jesus’ works. His sonship and apostleship could be disproved by deeds not congruent with them. Cf. 8:39f.—the *erga* of Abraham and his descendants . . . To recognise that the works of Jesus were the works of God would imply that God had sent Jesus . . .²²

For our purposes the passage is valid not merely in a metaphysical way—that Jesus was of the essence of the Father—but that the works which the Father did and which Jesus did showed his true Sonship, that is, he shows his Sonship in a relational and functional manner. Later we will see that these works are the works of a worker, that is, a servant. This is the substance of his discussion in John 14:8–14, where his works will be superseded by those who will serve after his going to the Father. We will need to discuss the matter of his glory which in its turn glorifies the Father (v. 13): ‘Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son’. The Son never ceases to work for the people God has given to him.

²² Barrett, pp. 320–321.

THE ASCENDED LORD AND SUBORDINATION

The claim that the Son is only subject to the Father’s superordination in his incarnation and not in his ascended state has to be examined. The question of his glorified humanity being forever united to his deity must also come under scrutiny. There is no question of his *not* being ‘one with the Father’, and ‘one with the Spirit’, for there can be no division within the Triune Godhead. Some would raise the question of the retroactive effects of the incarnation—and especially the work of the Cross—on the Godhead. We need to look at the work of Christ in this era, especially in the light of his Sonship and Messiahship, both of which are related to his Kingship in the Kingdom of God and his Lordship over the creation, this Lordship being both ontological and soteriological. As we will see, his present rule has much to do with the church—of which and for which he has been made Head—and so the matter of relationships within the Christian community is of first priority.

CHRIST AS KING AND LORD IN THIS ERA

Ephesians 5:5 speaks of ‘the kingdom of Christ and of God’, and in Revelation 11:15 the loud voices in heaven—following the blowing of the seventh trumpet—are heard saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever’, whilst in I Corinthians 15:24–28 the present process of history—under Christ

—is the putting down of all God’s enemies by both Christ and God, at the conclusion of which the Son ‘delivers the kingdom to God the Father . . . that God may be everything to every one [or, ‘all in all’].

All of this action is intimately linked with the fulfilment of Psalms 2 and 110 in the New Testament. In Psalm 2 the anointed of God (v. 6) is declared to be ‘my king on Zion, my holy hill’. The words affirming his coronation by the Lord are, ‘You are my son, today I have begotten you’. The nations are to be his heritage, and they are told to ‘Serve the Lord with fear, with trembling kiss his feet, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way’. In the NT the outcome is that Christ is King over the nations²³ and Lord over all the earth.²⁴

Psalm 110 also figures largely in Christ’s coronation as King–Priest in regard to the nations of the earth. The prolific use of verse 1, ‘The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool”’,²⁵ in the NT is indicative of how Christ was regarded as King in the early church. The specific use of verse 4²⁶ in the Epistle to the Hebrews, ‘The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a

²³ His being King involves all the major events of his incarnation; namely his baptism, ministry, transfiguration, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and session at the right hand of the Father.

²⁴ Undoubtedly Psalm 2:6–8 is linked with Acts 1:8, where ‘the end of the earth’ is common to both statements. The apostles are to preach Christ to the nations, and win from them ‘the obedience of faith’ of which Paul speaks in Romans 1:5, 15:18, and 16:25–27.

²⁵ The uses of Psalm 110:1 in the New Testament are many, for example, Matthew 22:44; 26:64; Acts 2:34–35; I Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3, 13; 10:12–13; 12:2.

²⁶ The uses of Psalm 110:4 in the NT are Hebrews 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:11, 15, 21.

priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek”’, sets Jesus out as the Priest–King with great significance, especially as the Epistle has much to say about both covenant and the Kingdom.

Linked with the use of Psalms 2 and 110 are the references to Jesus being ‘the Christ, the Son of the living God’ (Matt. 16:16—Peter’s confession; and Matt. 26:63—the high priest’s question), his being ‘the Son of God, the King of Israel’ (Nathanael’s confession in John 1:49), and ‘the King who comes in the name of the Lord’, and ‘Behold, your king is coming to you’ (Luke 19:38; cf. Matt. 21:5; Mark 11:9–10; cf. Zech. 9:9; Ps. 118:26). Paul’s statement in Romans 1:4, ‘designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord’, is at the basis of his declared Lordship—part of the *kerugmatik* announcement as we find it in the Acts of the Apostles—and typified by Acts 2:36, ‘Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified’ (cf. 3:14–15; 5:30–31). Thereafter the proclamation was ‘Jesus is Lord!’ (cf. Rom. 10:9; 14:9; I Cor. 12:3; II Cor. 4:5; cf. Rev. 17:14; 19:16).

It is clear that Christ—the risen Jesus—is Lord over all things,²⁷ King of the Kingdom²⁸ and Head²⁹ of the

²⁷ His Lordship is seen in references such as Acts 2:36; 9:10–42; Romans 10:9; I Corinthians 8:6; II Corinthians 4:5; Revelation 11:15; 17:14; 19:16. The Epistles refer naturally to him as ‘the Lord Jesus Christ’.

²⁸ His Kingship is inferred in Ephesians 5:5 and Revelation 11:15, is explicit in Hebrews, and should be seen as a result of his baptism in the Synoptic Gospels. John 18:37 and the entry into Jerusalem have reference to this Kingship.

²⁹ His Headship of the church is seen in the following references: I Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Colossians 1:18; 2:19.

church. Whatever he has been by eternal generation, and by virtue of his working in creation, he is now declared to be King, Lord and Head by his salvific work through his incarnation and his atonement. Even so, almost every reference we have considered above speaks of the Father or the Holy Spirit working to give this headship to the man Jesus. How else could it be? In the work of the Atonement it was God who was in Christ. It was the glory of the Father and the power of His Spirit which raised Jesus from the dead. It was this power which set him—Jesus—at His own right hand on high. Even then the Son is at the right hand and not in the centre.

The question is now, 'What was the position of the risen Lord in relation to the government of God?'. Is the Father *primus inter pares*? Does one Member defer to the other? Is there some order, some form of hierarchy, and does the taking on of flesh by the Son bring an element of inferiority into this Person of the Godhead? These are the things we will look at.

THE ORDER OF THE FATHER, THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE TRINITY

The order in which the Persons are mentioned in the New Testament is no final indicator to their position in the Godhead, if, indeed, we can talk after this manner. The normal salutations and closing greetings of most Epistles place 'God *the* [or, *our*] Father' first, and then 'the Lord Jesus Christ'. The grace at the end of II Corinthians speaks first of 'the Lord Jesus Christ',

then of 'God', and finally of 'the Holy Spirit'. In I Corinthians 12:4–5 the Spirit is mentioned first, then the Lord, and finally God. In such mentions function is the main determinant (cf. I Pet. 1:1–2, where the functional order is placed as the Father, the Spirit and Jesus Christ).

In the commission to baptise (Matt. 28:19) the order is 'Father', 'Son' and 'Holy Spirit',³⁰ whilst in Ephesians 4:4–6 it is reversed. Nothing can be gained from a comparison of such uses. If—apart from functional situations—the general order is 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit', then we ought to accept that, if only for efficiency in speaking. We should not find it embarrassing even in our egalitarian society to give preference to such an order. An immense amount of hypocrisy is found amongst those of an egalitarian mind!

Paul speaks of the Persons in I Corinthians 8:6: 'for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus

³⁰ I find it a bit puzzling when Gruenler, in speaking of Jesus using the order of Matthew 28:19, speaks of the Son being 'deferential' to the Father in citing the order of the Trinity. Gruenler (p. xviii) speaks of 'pride of place', which is rather amusing in regard to the Trinity, and goes on to speak of 'voluntary submission' as against 'necessary submission'. His statement is, 'Accordingly one must not mistake voluntary submission for necessary submission, for the latter will regress inevitably to a one-way subordination of Son and Spirit to the Father (and may lead in the end to Arianism)'. It seems to me that he betrays his own problem with subordinationism and authority when he says:

It would not be good exegesis to reintroduce such subordinationism into the Trinity in order to sanction unequal roles of authority and obedience within the believing community. Unequal roles are often required in church and society to check the presence of selfishness and evil that are the effects of the fall.

I find it a curious assumption that the Fall is blamed for the so-called 'unequal roles'.

Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist'. The Father is God, God is Father: Jesus Christ is Lord. In Colossians 1:3 God is 'the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'. In 3:3 the readers are told 'your life is hid with Christ in God'. The difference is there. In the Epistle to the Hebrews the Son is very high—higher than all others. As incarnate he learns obedience, and prays for salvation from death, but when he is glorified he is seated at God's right hand, and yet as Priest-King he intercedes for Man. He is mediator of the New Covenant. All these high things place him far beyond other creatures, but yet there are elements of subordination.

In the Johannine writings—as we have seen—the same principle obtains. All that the Son has, he is given by the Father. He comes from the Father's bosom. He is sent. His teaching is not his own but that of the one Who has sent him. He repeats what he has heard from the Father.

The Book of the Revelation is worthy of study in regard to precedence of the Persons. Revelation 1:1 says, 'The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what must soon take place; and he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John'. God (we take it 'the Father') gave to Jesus Christ the revelation of himself (i.e. of Jesus), so that Jesus would know the revelation and it could be made known to John the Seer through the angel whom God (or possibly Jesus) was sending to John. Here the *principium* is the Father's.³¹ If we understand the

³¹ For the most part in the NT the word or name 'God' refers to the Father, but then not always in His role as Father. In some cases it is probably that the word 'God' means 'the Triune God'. The context generally determines the case. Here in Revelation 1:1 God does not mean 'the Father and the Spirit' as against 'the Son'. In fact it is questionable whether God as a Binity can be used over and against what is the third Person of the Godhead in that context.

Persons to be coeval—which sensibly avoids the question of equality—then we can give what is due to the discrete Persons within the Triune relationship.

It is interesting that from a functional point of view in 1:4–6, God ('who is, and who was, and who is to come') is first mentioned, followed by the Holy Spirit ('the seven spirits who are before his throne') and then by the Son ('Jesus Christ, the faithful witness'), after which 'his God and Father' is mentioned. In verse 8 'the Lord God' is 'the Alpha and the Omega . . . who is and who was and who is to come'. In 22:13 unmis-takably the Lamb is 'the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end'.³² In chapters 2 and 3 Christ writes letters to the churches, but admon-ishes them to 'hear what the Spirit says to the churches'. In chapter 4 the one 'who was and is and is to come' is 'the Lord God Almighty' and accordingly receives

³² This opens up the subject of the seeming interchangeability of the Persons. In the famous Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 9:5–7 the 'child' and 'son who is given to us' is 'Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father'. I am aware of the possibilities here in translation, but to speak of this 'son' as the Father, comports with Christ the Son, who has put into his mouth by the writer of Hebrews (2:11–13) the text of Psalm 22:22, 'I will proclaim thy name to my brethren', and of Isaiah 8:17–18, 'Here am I and the children God has given me'. Christ addressed the disciples on two occasions as 'children' (John 13:33; 21:5). Christ cannot be the Son without being fatherly, since he draws from the Father. As we see above in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, Christ writes letters to the seven churches, but exhorts them to 'hear what the Spirit says to the churches', as though the Spirit were the author of the epistles.

praise and adoration, but in chapter 5 the one who receives universal praise and worship is the Lamb. Then the adoration changes to worship of 'him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb', and the Lamb has been designated as standing 'between the throne and the four living creatures'. In chapter 6 the terrified kings, great men, generals and others call on the mountains and rocks: 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb'. In 7:9 'a great multitude' stands before the throne and before the Lamb and gives praise 'to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb'. In the same chapter 'he who sits upon the throne' shelters the multitude with His presence, whilst 'the Lamb *in the midst of the throne* will be their shepherd'. It is interesting to note that God is on the throne, the Lamb stands before the throne; then God is seated on the throne, and yet the Lamb is in the midst of the throne. In chapter 11 the kingdom is 'the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and *he* shall reign for ever and ever', but the *he* is not designated as God or the Christ. In chapter 12 the child is 'caught up to God and to his throne'. In chapter 15 the Song of Moses and the Lamb is sung to 'the Lord God the Almighty' who is 'King of the ages', whilst in chapter 16, He is the 'Holy One' and 'Lord God the Almighty'; and in 19:16 the Lamb is 'King of kings and Lord of lords'. In 20:11ff. the one seated on the throne would seem to be God, yet elsewhere Christ is designated as the Judge (cf. John 5:22³³). In 21:22 'the Almighty and the Lamb' together

³³ John 5:22–23 are interesting verses, since the Father gives all judgment to the Son 'that all may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father', for 'He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him'. It seems the honour is to be the same for the Father and the Son, and since they are One they must have that same honour.

constitute the temple. In verse 23 'the glory of God' is the light of the city and 'its lamp is the Lamb'. 'Light' and 'lamp' here are a Hebrew parallelism, that is, they are synonymous.

In 22:1 and 3 the throne is 'the throne of God and of the Lamb', which completes our view of the throne, and the Father and the Lamb together on it. In 3:21 Christ says, 'He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne'. Of course the throne stands for ruling and government, and we understand how this ruling is shared, for in 20:4 there are thrones (plural), so that the martyrs 'came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years'.³⁴ Even so, the Lamb has precedence over the saints, and it is difficult to avoid the point that the Father has precedence over the Lamb. That is surely the message of the Book of the Revelation—if we can receive it. True as that is, yet the Father and the Lamb are one together, so that the word 'precedence' should not be read and understood in our faulty and discriminating human way.

When we come to the one called 'the third Person of the Trinity', that is, the Holy Spirit, we see him in 1:4 as 'the seven spirits who are before his [God's] throne'.

³⁴ This co-ruling is indicated in Romans 5:17 and Ephesians 2:5–6, having been foretold in Daniel 7:9, 18, 22, so that it is mentioned by Christ in Luke 22:29 (cf. I Cor. 6:3). That we will rule is certain, and Revelation 1:6 indicates that Christ has made us a kingdom of priests—to reign. This is borne out in Revelation 5:10 and 22:5, yet it is the Father and the Son who reign.

From Isaiah 11:2 we see the Spirit is the sevenfold Spirit; seven in the Revelation meaning complete, full and perfect as the Spirit is. He is the burning Spirit—‘seven torches of fire’—and in 5:6 the Lamb has seven eyes. The Lamb’s eyes are ‘like a flame of fire’, and so the seven eyes are seven such flames, for they are the sevenfold Spirit of God. The strength of the horns of the Lamb is the strength of the mighty sevenfold Spirit. So intimate with the Lamb is the sevenfold Spirit—so much one with him! All the nations belong to the Lamb, and so ‘the seven spirits of God [are] sent out into all the earth’ to claim the Son’s heritage through the gospel. In chapters 2 and 3—as we have seen—the Spirit is the one who speaks to the sevenfold church, and the Lamb warns the churches against failing to hear and obey the Spirit. The great prophecy of the Revelation is brought to John the Seer by the Spirit (cf. 1:10; 4:1–2; 17:3; 21:9–10), for it is the revelation given to Jesus by the Father, and the Spirit attends on both the Father and the Son. We saw that the sevenfold Spirit is always *before* the throne, though never *upon* it, and surely something about precedence is evident from this. In 7:15–17 it is the Father Who protects the redeemed multitude, the ‘Lamb in the midst of the throne’ who is their Shepherd, and he leads them to ‘springs of living water’, which are surely the Holy Spirit (cf. John 7:37–39). In Revelation 21:6 and 22:1, 2 and 17, the water and river of life are the Holy Spirit for those who will drink and live. The water issues from the throne—the place of the Father and the Lamb—and so the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Lamb. In 22:17 the Spirit and the Bride together say, ‘Come!’. The Spirit, too, is intimate with the Bride.

It is evident that the Father, the Lamb and the Spirit have some order of precedence and this does not pertain to ‘substance’ or ‘quality’, but to function. We must beware of trying to alter this order of precedence, lest we find we are fiddling ontologically with that which we do not know and that which may bring disaster in its wake. To conform to this Divine order must surely bring the joys that lie within that form.

The Passages of I Corinthians 15:24–28 and Philippians 2:9–11

In the first of these passages it is evident from the basic Psalm 110:1 used (cf. Heb. 2:8; 10:12–13), that on the one hand the Father is putting all things under the feet of the Son, whilst the Son is putting them under his own feet *for the Father*. The outcome of the defeat of the enemies is that the Son ‘*delivers the kingdom to God the Father*’, and in doing so ‘the Son himself will also *be subjected to him* who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one’. No one can deny the precedence of the Father, even though the two are coeval. Nor can it be said that there is a ‘voluntary sub-mission’ as against ‘a necessary submission’ (Gruenler, p. xvi). The matter of ‘voluntary’ and ‘necessary’ does not arise where the oneness of the Father and Son is present.

Likewise in Philippians 2:9–11 the Son is exalted by the Father because he was ‘obedient unto death, even death on a cross’. It is this death which bestows on him:

the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the

earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, *to the glory of God the Father*.

The Son has the Father's glory in view as the Father has the Son's glory in view by so highly exalting him.

THE GLORIES OF SUPERORDINATION AND SUBORDINATION

Because of their present connotation none of us likes to use these terms, but they have to be faced because they are used. If we persist in making these two words synonyms of superiority and inferiority then we will have to examine ourselves as to whether—one way or another—we have hidden agendas, or agendas which are not even hidden. The long-standing debate around the term *kephale*, that is, 'headship', is virtually at a stalemate, mainly because it is difficult to be wholly objective in our enquiry, and this because the stakes are high on both sides of the research. For 'headship' to mean 'lordship', and for 'lordship' to mean 'precedence', and for 'precedence' to mean 'power', is intolerable to some of us. That headship is a term met within the Scriptures is without doubt. If *kephale* means 'source' or 'origin' and does not mean 'authoritative', and if the head cannot functionally give commands to the body of which it is head, then it may mean we are on the way to an egalitarian situation. Whichever way we must go—and we must go the right way, and neither of the alternatives may necessarily be the right way—we must still go! We may discover there is a superordination and subordination which are incorrect and one which is correct, or we may bypass both and come to

know something which is the true way, and so the way of life.

THE DELIGHT OF THE GLORY OF GOD

Jonathan Edwards, in his 'An Essay on the Trinity', contained in a volume of posthumously published writing entitled *Treatise on Grace*, has a delightful introduction to his work on the Trinity:

Tis common when speaking of the divine happiness to say that God is infinitely happy in the enjoyment of Himself, in perfectly beholding and infinitely loving, and rejoicing in, His own essence and perfections, and accordingly it must be supposed that God perpetually and eternally has a most perfect idea of Himself, as it were an exact image and representation of Himself ever before Him and in actual view, and from hence arises a most pure and perfect act or energy in the Godhead, which is the Divine love, complacence and joy.³⁵

This extraordinary notion of God's delight in Himself (cf. Jer. 9:23–24) is developed by Edwards, by which he sets out his views on the nature of the Trinity.³⁶ Even if we concede

³⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise on Grace*, James Clarke & Co. Ltd, Cambridge & London, 1971, p. 99.

³⁶ Some words by Paul Helm, the editor of *Treatise on Grace*, and in particular his explanation of Edwards's argument for the Trinity, are worth reading. On page 20 he says:

Edwards argues as follows: if God has an idea of something absolutely perfect 'there is nothing in the pattern but what is in the representation'. As, according to Edwards an idea of love is an instance of love, so God's idea of Himself is Himself. 'Therefore as God with perfect clearness, fullness and strength, understands Himself, views His own essence (in which there is no distinction of substance and act but which is wholly substance and wholly act) that idea which God hath of Himself is absolutely Himself' (p. 101.) This is an ingenious and bold argument, which might fairly be called 'ontological'. To have an idea of *x*, where *x* is 'non-material' is for *x* to exist. Hence God's idea of Himself, a most perfect spirit, is Himself, i.e. is what the Bible calls the Word of God. And the necessary affection that arises between God and His Word is the Holy Spirit. 'This is the eternal and most perfect and essential act of the Divine nature, wherein Godhead acts in an infinite degree and in the post [most?] perfect manner possible. The deity becomes all act, the divine essence itself flows out and is as it were breathed forth in love and joy. So that the Godhead therein stands forth in yet another manner of subsistence, and there proceeds the third Person in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, viz. the deity in act, for there is no other act but the act of the will' (p. 106).

that Edwards's ontological argument could not be validated, we are indeed moved by his personal view of God. In his essay on the Trinity, Edwards admits the limitations of his argument:

But I don't pretend fully to explain how these things are and I am sensible a hundred other objections may be made and puzzling doubts and questions raised that I can't solve. I am far from pretending to explaining the Trinity so as to render it no longer a mystery. I think it to be the highest and deepest of all divine mysteries still, notwithstanding anything I have said or conceived about it. I don't intend to explain the Trinity.³⁷

Helm observes that 'Edwards was a metaphysician, but he was no rationalist. The mysteries of revelation were to be mysteries still'.

My point in raising Edwards's view of the Trinity is that we may view the Trinity from our present sociological vantage point, being influenced and even conditioned by our own social mores. If we take as a presupposition our egalitarian theory of personality and relationships, then we may unwittingly divest ourselves of the great glory and mystery of the Godhead. Our *nous* ought to be as God demanded (Isa. 66:2), 'But this

Helm dispatches Edwards's theory, and concludes that if valid it would represent tritheism.

³⁷ Edwards, pp. 121–122.

is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word'. Where this humility is lost or absent there will be no limit to the arrogance of the inquirer into the mysteries of God. Christ's statement:

All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him,

shows that ultimately the 'mystery of God' is seen by the humble metaphysician rather than the brilliant rationalist. Any kind of arrogance necessarily prohibits us from knowing the truth which is the relational knowledge of God in His being—knowledge which we are permitted within the parameters of our humanity by the Divine kindness (cf. I John 4:7–10).

I suppose myself, then, to be saying what Father Danielou was saying in regard to the word 'wrath', but which I would say about the precedence of authority, that is, the word 'greater'³⁸ as in John 14:28: 'this particular word may carry a stronger charge of mystical significance than any other, and afford the deepest insight into the meaning of the divine transcendence'.

³⁸ Here we are not meaning by 'greater than I' that this is in regard to being superior, but rather that the Source precedes the reception of the gift it gives. Dependency upon the Source does not mean that the dependent being is lower than the Source of being, for being one with that Source is love, and love has no regard for 'inferior' or 'superior', although it takes note of the hierarchical order which itself is a serving order. Only in that the Source *serves* is it great, and greater than what it serves. The greatness of being served is shown in worship and adoration and gratitude for the gifts it receives. The Source for its true flowing is, in one sense, dependent upon the receiving of the receptor.

I mean that the Father as the *fons divinitatis* of the Godhead,³⁹ as the fountainhead of all Divine Being and as the powerful repository of all wisdom and truth, may have within Himself that precedence which allows the Son and the Spirit to draw fully upon—through the *perichoresis*—the resources that are needed for the Son to be the Son of the Father, and the Spirit to be the Spirit of the Father and the Son. In turn, the gifts of the dynamic, actional *perichoresis* constitutes that supply which initiates, energises and brings to true pitch those relationships which we call ‘human’, because that is how it is in the Divine sphere. In the Divine sphere the Son and Spirit draw from the *fons divinitatis*—the Father—but then they return what is given in the receiving–giving reciprocal movement. This is clearly illustrated in John 17:1, where Jesus says, ‘glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee’, and in John 13:31–32 Jesus said, ‘Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified; if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once’. The circulatory and mutual penetrative action of the Persons is clearly seen. When it is seen that glori-fication is not *giving* to another what is not already in that one, but is the *revelation* of what is, and so is valid ascription, then the question of ascension and conde-scension in regard to relationships does not arise.

Surely this is the point of John 16:13–15:

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that

³⁹ See Beasley-Murray (p. 262).

are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. *All that the Father has is mine*; therefore I said that *he will take what is mine* and declare it to you [emphasis mine].

In John 17:7–10 Jesus said:

Now they know that everything that *thou hast given me* is from thee; for *I have given them* the words *which thou gavest me*, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from thee; and they have believed that thou didst send me. I am praying for them; I am not praying for the world but for those whom thou hast given me, for *they are thine; all mine are thine, and thine are mine*, and I am glorified in them [emphasis mine].

If we link these two passages with John 3:35 (cf. Matt. 11:27), ‘the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand’, then we see what the Son has is *from* the Father. We may be tempted to confine this giving and receiving to the incarnate Jesus as Son, but the references go beyond such a limitation. The Father is the Fountainhead of Sonship, but then He does not give more to the Son than what Sonship requires for its true filial being. It is in the light of this that ‘I and the Father are one’ should be understood.

The following passage of Edwards speaks of this order that has been understood as orthodox:

Hereby we see how the Father is the fountain of the Godhead, and why when He is spoken of in Scripture He is so often, without any addition or distinction, called God, which has led some to think that He only was truly and properly God. Hereby we may see why in the oeconomy of the persons of the Trinity the Father should sustain the dignity of the deity, that the Father should have it as His office to uphold and maintain the rights of the Godhead and should be God not only by essence but, as it were, by his oeconomical office. Hereby is illustrated the

doctrine of the Holy Ghost. Proceeding [from] both the Father and the Son. Hereby we see how that it is possible for the Son to be begotten by the Father and the Holy Ghost to proceed from the Father and the Son, and yet that all the persons should be coeternal. Hereby we may more clearly understand the equality of the persons among themselves, and that they are in every way equal in the society or family of the three. They are equal in honour: besides the honour which is common to 'em all, viz. that they are all God, each has His peculiar honour in the society or family. They are equal not only in essence, but the Father's honour is that He is, as it were, the author of perfect and infinite wisdom. The Son's honour is that He is that perfect and divine wisdom itself the excellency of which is that from whence arises the honour of being the author or generator of it. The honour of the Father and the Son is that they are infinitely excellent, or that from them infinite excellency proceeds; but the honour of the Holy Ghost is equal for He is that divine excellency and beauty itself. Tis the honour of the Father and the Son that they are infinitely holy and are the fountain of holiness, but the honour of the Holy Ghost is that holiness itself. The honour of the Father and the Son is [that] they are infinitely happy and are the original and fountain of happiness, and the honour of the Holy Ghost is equal for He is infinite happiness and joy itself. The honour of the Father is that He is the fountain of the deity as He from whom proceed both the Divine wisdom and also excellency and happiness. The honour of the Son is equal for He is Himself the Divine wisdom and is He from whom proceeds the Divine excellency and happiness, and the honour of the Holy Ghost is equal for He is the beauty and happiness of both the other persons.⁴⁰

Edwards's statement (above) on the Persons of the Trinity shows them as coeval but preserves the nature of the Father as the *fons divinitatis*—the Fountainhead of the Son and the Spirit, whilst at the same time emphasising their oneness in what they are and do. Edwards

⁴⁰ Edwards, pp. 122–123.

then goes on to describe the oneness of the Three Persons through what we have previously described as 'concentredness'. Any hierarchical order that might exist must be seen to be circulatory. So Edwards says:

... let it be considered that the whole Divine office is supposed truly and properly to subsist in each of the three, viz., God and His understanding and love, and that there is such a wonder-ful union between them that they are, after an ineffable and inconceivable manner, one in another, so that one hath another and they have communion in one another and are as it were predicable one of another; as Christ said of Himself and the Father, I am in the Father and the Father in me, so it may be said concerning all the persons in the Trinity, the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father, the Holy Ghost is in the Father and the Father in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost is in the Son and the Son in the Holy Ghost, and the Father understands because the Son who is the divine understanding is in Him, the Father loves because the Holy Ghost is in Him, so the Son loves because the Holy Ghost is in Him and proceeds from Him, so the Holy Ghost or the divine essence subsisting is divine, but understands because the Son the divine idea is in Him. Understanding may be predicated of this love because it is the love of the understanding both objectively and subjectively.⁴¹

We can conclude, then, that the 'wonderful union between them that they are, *after an ineffable and inconceivable manner*, one in another, so that one hath another, and they have communion in one another [emphasis mine]' is the answer to those who interpret 'the Father is greater than I' to be a temporary state of the Son in incarnation, and not an ontological state within the immanent Trinity. Those who interpret it thus

⁴¹ Edwards, p. 120.

have no place for the *fons divinitatis* of the Father, mistakenly thinking that this would mean a superiority of the Father and a—virtual—domination of the Son. This is to reckon without the ‘other-person concentratedness’ of the Three Members of the Triune family, and this must lead to a misunderstanding of the ‘Ode to Christ’ in Philippians 2:5–11. For the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit to look not on their own interests but rather on the interests of others, and to ‘consider others better than themselves’, is to show interrelational servanthood of the Three—a servanthood which knows nothing of superiority and inferiority of being.

UNDERSTANDING SUBORDINATION

We have seen that Gruenler—with others—speaks of a *voluntary* submission or subordination as against a *necessary* one. This indicates that the Son subsists in equality but is prepared to surrender it for the exigency of salvation. We have seen that some theologians link this with the inferiority of his manhood to his deity, or to the deity of the Godhead. Subordination in the case of incarnation is *voluntary* but is not of the order of the immanent Trinity, that is, is not *necessary* subordination. We have also seen that if the Son is in any sense subordinate to the Father, then that calls in question the equality of the two and—seemingly—plays into the hands of the Arians.

We have considered the thought that the unity of the Godhead is in and through love, and that love serves, and so serving is not essentially a proof or expression of subordination. Good and correct as these facts are, there

is still behind us the thought that subordination is not, nevertheless, a good thing ontologically, although it may be called for economically. We have also thought that, as there is a *principium* of the Father, then maybe this demands some kind of an order of precedence. The truth about the *principium* is that the Father has to give and has always been giving. The Son and the Spirit do not come to know the repository of truth. Their procession from the Father is not an attainment but a given thing. It can be said of the Father what was said of believers in the early church: ‘no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common’ (Acts 4:32). This is the true order of the *perichoresis*. Nothing was hidden, nor ungiven, so that in this sense there was no subordination to the *principium* of the Father. All of these rationalisations regarding subordination are correct, but they do not seem sufficient to end the debate concerning it. We must either blame ourselves for seeing subordination as a thing of opprobrium, when it may not be—in which case we may have to trace the opprobrium back to our sinfully human refusal to have any kind of hierarchical order in the Deity and thus in the true order of human ontology—or we must find a place for it in the true order of the Triune family.

Benjamin Warfield in his superb Essay ‘The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity’ in his *Biblical and Theological Studies*, recognises possibilities of subordination of the Son and the Spirit but examines them all and pronounces that there is no *prima facie* case for it.⁴² On the other hand, P. T.

⁴² Benjamin Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Philadelphia, 1968, p. 53:

Jesus was, rightly, understood to call God ‘his *own* Father’, that is, to use the terms ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ not in a merely figurative sense, as when Israel was called God’s son, but in the real sense. And this was understood to be claiming to be all that God is. To be the Son of God in any sense was to be like God in that sense; to be God’s *own* Son was to be exactly like God, to be ‘equal with God’. Similarly we read in I Cor. ii.10, 11: ‘For the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For who of men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man which is in him? Even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God.’ Here the Spirit appears as the

Forsyth—a contemporary of Warfield—in his book *Marriage: Its Ethic and Religion* in a chapter entitled ‘The Matter of Subordination’, makes these observations:

1. Our moral principles as Christians must flow far less from precepts than from the revealed nature of the Christian God. Our moral foundations are in the holy mountain; all our springs are in Him. Now the nature of that God is Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit. Father and Son co-exist, co-equal in the Spirit of holiness, *i.e.* of perfection. But Father and Son is a relation inconceivable except the Son be obedient to the Father. The perfection of the Son and the perfecting of His holy work lay, not in His suffering, but in His obedience. And, as He was Eternal Son, it meant an eternal obedience; for the supreme work of Christ, so completely identified with His person, could not be done by anything which was not as eternal as His person.

substrate of the Divine self-consciousness, the principle of God’s knowledge of Himself: He is, in a word, just God Himself in the innermost essence of His Being. As the spirit of man is the seat of human life, the very life of man itself, so the Spirit of God is His very life-element. How can He be supposed, then, to be subordinate to God, or to derive His Being from God? If, however, the subordination of the Son and the Spirit to the Father in modes of subsistence and their derivation from the Father are not implicates of their designation as Son and Spirit, it will be hard to find in the New Testament compelling evidence of their subordination and derivation.

Warfield obviously thinks subordination to the Father and derivation from Him are *not* implicates of their designation as Son and Spirit. He freely admits there is a subordination ‘in the functions ascribed to the several persons of the Trinity in the redemptive process’.

But obedience is not conceivable without some form of subordination. Yet in His very obedience the Son was co-equal with the Father; the Son’s yielding will was no less divine than the Father’s exigent will. Therefore, in the very nature of God, subordination implies no inferiority. It is as divine as rule, for it is self-subordination on an infinite scale; it is not enforced. It is sacrifice, it is not mere resignation. It is no slavery, but willing service. And if man is to be holy as He is holy, our self-subordination to each other is not necessarily inferiority, nor need obedience be slavery. There is an obedience bound up with the supreme dignity of Christian love, so that where most love is, there also is most obedience.

So little is it true when Kant says that for moral purposes it is indifferent whether we believe in a Trinitarian God or a Unitarian. For the individual it may matter less, but for society it means much whether self-subordination is intrinsically divine and truly God-like.⁴³

F. D. Maurice in his book *Theological Essays* has an essay entitled ‘The Son of God’, which quotes a statement from ‘a grave Unitarian of the old school’ (p. 78):

You have suggested . . . to us . . . that what He was on earth must be the explanation of what He is . . . If the idea of subordination in the Son to the Father . . . is once lost sight of, or considered an idle and unimportant school tenet, the morality of the Gospel and its divinity disappear together. You have helped to keep alive in our minds the distinction of the Persons, and that I believe is absolutely necessary that we may confess the unity of Substance.⁴⁴

Warfield, Forsyth, and Maurice (though he was somewhat before their time) were men whose roots

⁴³ P. T. Forsyth, *Marriage: Its Ethics and Religion*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, n.d., pp. 69–71.

⁴⁴ F. D. Maurice, *Theological Essays*, James Clarke & Co. Ltd, London, 1957.

were in the nineteenth century, and who witnessed the incursion of liberalism, not so much in theology as in the new sociology, the new socialism. No one was to know that the revolutionary dialectic of Marxism was to bring a massive kingtide across the world which would change the face and destiny of nations and bring unprecedented bloodshedding, genocide and massive annihilation of lives to the tune of millions of victims—and all of it in the name of liberation from oppression. Warfield's theology was impeccable and his treatment of the Trinity remarkable. Maurice could never forget the dissension Unitarianism had brought to biblical theology, and he was a man for mankind, working for social reform as he, J. M. F. Ludlow, and Charles Kingsley formed the Christian Socialists, which was not just a soft movement for sufferers in the community, but a movement to reform the social bases of society itself. Warfield—a brilliant evangelical scholar and a competent biblicist—stood against the tide of theological liberalism, and his guarding of the equality of the Persons in the Godhead had no egalitarian motivation. Forsyth — whose writings are receiving fresh recognition today — was deeply interested in historical critical theology which he desired to use for a renewal of evangelical realities. In his *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*,⁴⁵ 'he made a creative contribution to Christology in suggesting that *kenosis* (self-emptying) and *plerosis* (fulfilling) are the two movements from God to man and from man to God which savingly occur in Christ'.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ P. T. Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1910.

⁴⁶ Haddon Willmer in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. J. D. Douglas, Paternoster, Exeter, 1978, p. 383. Whilst Haddon Willmer claims that Forsyth's greatest work was *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, it must not be read apart from his other works, especially *The Cruciality of the Cross* (1910, reprinted NCPI, 1984) and *The Justification of God* (1917, reprinted NCPI, 1988). The heart of Forsyth's kenotic theology lies in the Cross, and likewise his theology of theodicy, for without what he called Christ's

These three men were deeply gripped by Trinitarian theology. Warfield saw no place for essential subordination in the second Person of the Godhead, but the other two men did. From our vantage point in time we might think that all three theologians were seeking to maintain—as they saw it—an orthodoxy of the Trinity, but their views of the Trinity were dynamic. Even so, they seem to undiscerning readers to have been traditionalist Trinitarians, and this especially so in the light of contemporary liberation theology. All we need to see for the moment is that they held dynamic views of the Cross—their theology being rooted in it and arising from it. Forsyth has a view of *kenosis* which releases it from what he calls 'metaphysical psychology'. He says:

Let us escape, then, from crude notions of finite and infinite, of weakness and omnipotence. If the infinite God was so constituted that he could not live also as a finite man then he was not infinite. There was a limitation to that extent in His power's infinity, and one which he Himself did not impose. But if He did live as finite man, then so far was it from being a limitation of His freedom (except externally and formally) that it was the greatest exercise of it. It was the greatest act of moral freedom ever done. The Godhead that freely made man was never so free as in becoming man. His self-limitation was so far from impairing his being that it became the mightiest act of it that we know. It was not limitation so much as concentration. Was

'self-humiliation' there could be no release of God's power to redeem or to effect true judgment in history.

Christ less mighty for his work when He was straitened till it should be accomplished? It was rather His intensest concentration for the carrying out of His final purpose with the world. It was the most condensed expression of holy love. It was holy love acting at a point once for all.⁴⁷

In the light of these words the so-called subordination of himself becomes a most glorious act, if not *the* most glorious act, of history. Far from being demeaned by his incarnation he is exalted by it. So Forsyth can say:

This self-renouncing, self-retracting act of the Son's will, this reduction of Himself from the supreme end to be the supreme means for the soul, is no negation of his nature; it is the opposite, it is the last assertion of his nature as love. It is no negation of his freedom; it is rather the freest energy of his whole will. He never willed anything so mightily and freely as the subjection, the renunciation of self-will to the holy requirement of God. It is the concentrated omnipotence of love, and not of mere power, that underlies his limited earthly existence. And it is incessant obedience. The whole detail of that earthly existence is the expression of the act of will by which, in his omnipotent love, he entered the world . . . To appear and act as Redeemer, to be born, suffer, and die, was a mightier act of Godhead than lay in all the creation, preservation, and blessing of the world. It was only in the exercise of a perfect divine fullness (and therefore power) that Christ could empty and humble himself to the servant he became. As the humiliation grew so grew the exaltation of the power and person that achieved it. It was an act of such might that it was bound to break through the servant form, and take at last for all men's worship the lordly name.⁴⁸

This kind of statement places obedience and subordination above human argumentation. So-called subordination becomes the means of the highest service. At

⁴⁷ Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, pp. 315–316.

⁴⁸ Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, pp. 313–314.

the same time it is a revelation of the nature of God as Servant. It explains and explicates a true anthropology of created Man—that he was made to serve—to be other-person centred and other-person concentrated to the point that he would lay down his life for the other, that he would lose his life to save the other, that he would be willing to be cursed that the other might find blessing. Forsyth goes on to show that the act of *kenosis* (self-emptying) is the source of the *plerosis* (self-filling and fulfilling) which could well comport with the statement of Hebrews 12:2, 'who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God'. Even so, we must not think of the *kenosis* as a calculated means to obtain the *plerosis*. It would be a mean mind which would view it this way, as also a mind which could not possibly grasp the suffering of the *kenosis*.

Karl Barth in his *Church Dogmatics*, volume 4, part 1, chapter 14, 'Jesus Christ, the Lord as Servant', under the heading 'I. The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country',⁴⁹ greatly amplifies the principle of the *kenosis* and the serving of the human race by God and His Son. He develops the whole principle of self-abasement, of dynamic weakness and of deliberate humility from the stores of New Testament action and teaching. He speaks of the Godhead of Christ in the following way:

True Godhead in the New Testament is being in the absolute freedom of love, and therefore the being of the Most High who is high and almighty and eternal and righteous and glorious not

⁴⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, pt 1, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1974, pp. 157–210.

also but precisely in His lowliness. The direct New Testament attestation of this Godhead of Christ is the attestation of the man Jesus Himself as the Son of God become flesh and suffering and crucified and dying for us, the message of Christ crucified (I Cor. 1:23; 2:2). It is clear that in the sense of the New Testament this and this alone is decisive and basic. There is no lowliness which is divine in itself and as such. There is therefore no general principle of the cross in which we have to do with God (in principle) . . . It is the deity of the true God revealed in the humility of Christ which as such can and must find its confirmation in our own humiliation. But the confirmation is of something which so far as I know Gregory of Nyassa (*Or. Cat.* 24) was the only one of the Church fathers expressly to mention: that the descent to humility which took place in the incarnation of the Word is not only not excluded by the divine nature but signifies its greatest glory: *περιουσία τις ἐστὶν τοῦ δυναμῆως*.⁵⁰

Barth adds:

For, according to the New Testament, it is the case that the humility of this man is an act of obedience, not a capricious choice of lowliness, suffering and dying . . . but a free choice made in recognition of an appointed order, in execution of a will which imposed itself authoritatively upon Him, which was intended to be obeyed. If, then, God is in Christ, if what the man Jesus does is God's own work, this aspect of the self-emptying and self-humbling of Jesus Christ as an act of obedience cannot be alien to God. But in this case we have to see here the other and inner side of the mystery of the divine nature of Christ and therefore of the nature of the true God—that He Himself is also able and free to render obedience.⁵¹

Barth goes on to discuss the seeming contradiction of a divine obedience within the Godhead:

⁵⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, pp. 191–192.

⁵¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, p. 193.

We must certainly accept and take seriously the whole sphere in which we have to speak of divine obedience, in which, therefore, we have to reckon with an above and a below, a *prius* and a *posterius*, a superiority and a subordination in God.⁵²

The two ways of attempting to deal with this are those of modalism (Sabellianism) and subordinationism. The former does not make the one subject-centre as a person but a mode of God who has one subject-centre—Himself Monarchically. The latter simply nominates the Son a person superior to man, but inferior to God. What, then, is the solution? For Barth it lies in the meaning and fact of 'God was in Christ'. Barth insists that God—as the Trinity—cannot be one thing ontologically and another economically. He therefore says:

It is a matter (3)—and this is the connecting point—of the one true God being Himself the subject of the act of atonement in such a way that His presence and action as the Reconciler of the world coincide and are indeed identical with the existence of the humiliated and lowly and obedient man Jesus of Nazareth. He acts as the Reconciler in that—as the true God identical with this man—He humbles Himself and becomes lowly and obedient. He becomes and is this without being in contradiction to His divine nature . . . God chooses condescension. He chooses humiliation, lowliness and obedience . . . The God of the New Testament witness is the God who makes this choice, who in agreement with Himself and His divine nature, but in what is for us the revelation of a *novum mysterium*, humbles Himself and is lowly and obedient amongst us . . . Granted that we do see and understand this, we cannot refuse to accept the humiliation and lowliness and supremely the obedience of Christ as the dominating moment in our conception of God.⁵³

⁵² Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, p. 196.

⁵³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, p. 199.

Barth then insists:

We have not only not to deny but actually to affirm and understand as essential to the being of God the offensive fact that there is in God Himself an above and a below, a *prius* and a *posterius*, a superiority and a subordination . . . that it belongs to the inner life of God that there should take place within it obedience . . . His divine unity consists in the fact that in Himself he is both One who is obeyed and Another who obeys.⁵⁴

Hendrikus Berkhof notes that G. C. Berkouwer in *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*⁵⁵ (ch. 11) 'regards this as a trespassing of what faith can know in the direction of Theopaschitism'.⁵⁶

From Barth onward we find contemporary Trinitarian theology increasingly moving in the direction of Theopaschitism. Our purpose in examining the nature of the Trinity was to discover the internal relations of the Person so that we could find an ontology of relationships in regard to *analogia entis*, and perhaps advance beyond such via the revelation of God Himself through the *kenosis* and Christ's obedience in subordination. Rejecting subordinationism as a solution to Christ's submission to the Father we sought to see whether there is a valid subordination of the Son to the Father without impairing what has been called the equality of the Persons. It seems to me that Forsyth's presentation of the *kenosis* and *plerosis* covers this element of subordination very well. Barth takes the further step of saying this

⁵⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, pp. 200–201.

⁵⁵ G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, The Paternoster Press, London, 1956.

⁵⁶ Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979, p. 336.

is how God is, that inherent in the Triune Godhead there is a *prius* and a *posterius*, but he presents it in such a way as to preserve the Son from having this *prius* and the Father the *posterius*.

Whilst Barth does not have a one-subject Godhead which would take him on the way to modalism, nevertheless Moltmann in his assessment of Barth's Trinitarian theology heads his study entitled, '5. Trinitarian Monarchy: Karl Barth',⁵⁷ and appears to criticise Barth as having a one-subject Godhead. This is probably because Moltmann is increasingly gripped by what he himself calls 'Patri-compassionism' as he transcends the formal passibility of God as held by earlier scholastics and most of the Reformers. The title of his work *The Crucified God* indicates his direction.

Berkouwer in his *A Half Century of Theology* says of the direction taken in *The Crucified God*:⁵⁸

Moltmann is talking about a deeper concept than divine compassion. He is working with a consistent, thoroughgoing crucifixion theology. He coined the word *patri-compassionism*, a twist on the old patipassianism. Compared to the old form of patipassianism Moltmann's probing goes much further. 'He humbles himself and takes on the eternal death of the godless and the forsaken, so that all the godless and the forsaken can experience communion with him' (*The Crucified God*, p. 276). And here the older efforts at theodicy are ruled out, for now it is clear *how* man is taken 'into the life and suffering, the death and resurrection of God' (*ibid.*, p. 277). Thus a 'post-Auschwitz theology' is possible after all. For the abstract questions of theodicy fall away in the shadow of the event of the cross. The

⁵⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God*, SCM, London, 1981, pp. 139–144.

⁵⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, SCM, London, 1974.

cross is 'the beginning of the trinitarian history of God,' a history in which God is so completely absorbed that the fourth word from the cross could aptly read: 'Why have you abandoned yourself?'⁵⁹

I do not propose to follow Moltmann, Jüngel (*The Doctrine of the Trinity*⁶⁰) and Pannenburg (*Jesus—God and Man*⁶¹) along the path indicated, since we have reasonably dealt with the matter of subordination. I am aware that the theology of the Cross of these writers is deeply significant for man's view of the Trinitarian inter-relationships of the Persons, but it seems to me that these theologians are in territory which is outside the parameters of our study. For this reason I would like to sum up the findings of this Appendix.

As I see it, the Christological controversy and the formation of the Creeds, Nicene and Athanasian, led the church of the Fathers into a Trinitarian doctrine which preserved the reality of the Three Persons—as against Tritheism; and the unity of the Persons—as against one-subject consciousness of Monarchianism, and the one-subject three modes of Sabellianism. The preservation of the equalitarian nature of the Three Persons was the buttress against Arianism, defeated subordinationism, but did not sufficiently proceed to the dynamics of true *kenosis* and the consequent *plerosis*. The theological research of this century has opened the way for a fresh understanding, an explication of the *perichoresis* and the *paraenesis* which pertains to relationships. Perhaps

one of the major fruits of such scholarship is the increasing awareness that any division between the ontological and economic views of the Trinity must be artificial and finally untenable. At the same time a treatment of the Trinity solely in the abstract (ontological or immanent), or solely in the concrete (revelational or economic), will not prove sufficient. The whole matter of God being so involved in His universe that He is learning as He goes and is attaining His immanent fullness by so doing—one of the premises of process theology—is, to say the least, interesting, but its implications for our study will require expanding its present parameters, which we are not about to do, nor feel bound to so do.

As for the relevance of the Trinitarian findings for the matter of Divine and human relationships, that analysis lies ahead of us. Even so we have seen that servanthship is not a sign of inferiority but is the mode of true love and has a transcendent quality. Indeed the human concern about subordination and superordination seems to me to be about things indifferent. True relationships are not hindered by these concepts, seeing they have no basis in the ontology of God and Man.

⁵⁹ G. C. Berkouwer, *A Half Century of Theology: Movements and Motives*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1977, p. 255.

⁶⁰ E. Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being Is in Becoming*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1976.

⁶¹ W. Pannenburg, *Jesus—God and Man*, SCM, London, 1976.

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